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This dissertation is an investigation into the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice. Supported by the philosophies of David Purpel, Maxine Greene, and John Dewey, this analysis is engaged through six themes examined through the text of David Simon's series, *The Wire*. These themes supply a foundation for how we might more thoroughly engage with moral imagination on a daily basis because there is a crisis in our culture around how we value the lives of all people. Themes presented in this discussion are: (1) The idea that everybody matters; (2) A changing notion of truth; (3) Thoughtlessness and banality; (4) Wide-awakeness and not taking things for granted; (5) Asking critical questions; and lastly, (6) People claiming responsibility. Applying these themes to specific textual examples excerpted from a dramatized television serial creates a space to discuss prophetic in-betweenness to interrogate and examine situations of systemic dysfunction and economic injustice outside of a fictional space.

ALL THE PIECES MATTER: DISCOVERING MORAL  
IMAGINATION ALONG *THE WIRE*

by

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## APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

It's a thin line 'tween heaven and here. —Bubbles, (Simon, 2011).

Watch this program if you are interested in the experiences of people in the inner city and systemic urban inequality, (William Julius Wilson, Congressional briefing on Culture and Poverty, 2010).

What matters is that people of different social backgrounds, different walks of life, encounter one another, bump up against one another in the ordinary course of life because this is what teaches us to negotiate and to abide our differences. And this is how we come to care for the common good. (Michael Sandel, 2013).

Densely populated cities teeming with inhabitants are a manifestation of this country's democracy experiment—where people walk along, stumble across, and interact with each other in a seemingly choreographed parade of imagination, connection and innovation. But consider the people left out of the picture painted above—packed away in dire living conditions, without meaningful work or educational opportunity. Within our democracy there is an ever increasing distance between those living at the poverty level and those living far

above it, and exists entire groups of people whose experience does not mirror our own. I've chosen to write this dissertation on the subject of moral imagination using *The Wire* as supporting context viewed through the philosophical lenses of David Purpel, Maxine Greene, and John Dewey in hopes of opening up broader conversations that address poverty and oppression. My academic interests focus on uses for the tool of moral imagination to explore how issues of inequality, systemic dysfunction, and support of human dignity are connected to everyone. A study of the tool of moral imagination in the spaces of early twenty-first century inner-city landscapes provides an opportunity to discuss the darker side of democracy, of people living off the grid and below the poverty line, who have been left out of the American dream, gallantly described below.

That dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement....It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position, (Adams, 1932, p.404).

In place of the American Dream, the poor in America are instead caught in a real-life nightmare of experience within a culture that sometimes does not want to recognize, much less take the necessary steps to improve that existence. Smiley and West concur, "Most Americans choose instead to

segregate themselves from poverty. The stereotypes and stigmas serve as curtains that separate 'us' from 'them'," (2013, p.60). Statistical averages describing conditions of poverty and inequality do little to convey the essence of the experience of people living in oppressive conditions. I choose to work in and around the text of *The Wire* to explore my topic because its narrative tells stories of human beings existing in, around, and in-between these facts and figures. As a work of fiction, the story gives depth to static demographic numerical representations by creating descriptions of characters that cannot be glossed over with statistics. Moreover, the philosophers I've chosen to accompany me on this explorative journey agree that each person deserves to live a life without oppression and that each person's experience matters to the whole of society. Experimenting with the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice through a fictional work to highlight the stories in between is one way we might begin to negotiate the space between the haves and the have-nots.

I do not believe that I now know what it means to exist in conditions of dire inner-city poverty after delving repeatedly into this series; however I do believe examining this series through the tool of moral imagination and including examples from the text to share with others provides a breadth to my discussion that might otherwise be missed—we as human beings are inextricably connected, and it is our common responsibility to look out for and work to alleviate human suffering. Focusing the tool of moral imagination on social



justice issues helps to keep an eye toward unnecessary suffering by recognizing that everybody matters; that a notion of truth changes from individual to individual; that thoughtless and banal activities have to be more thoroughly interrogated; that looking with fresh eyes at things taken-for-granted is a necessity; that having the courage to ask critical questions is crucial; and finally that claiming responsibility for others lived experience is transformational. These themes are looked at closely throughout the course of this writing, using examples pulled from *The Wire* to provide points of connection and paths of discussion.

There is life or death urgency behind statistics of inequality and impoverishment featured daily in news headlines, but somehow a decision is made by some individuals to separate the “us from them,” (Smiley and West, 2013, p.60). I have chosen to explore the tool of moral imagination through the text of *The Wire* because the series opens up spaces for discussion that affect the lived experiences of people living beneath and around the poverty line, and depicts individuals whose concerns and choices aptly illustrate what it means to claim responsibility for the lives of others. By becoming acquainted with characters in the series through the philosophical lenses of Purpel, Greene and Dewey, viewers may more easily bridge the distance between “us and them” by connecting these stories to their own and opening up discussion spaces to address the “what if”.

### ***The Wire* as Text**

In his original overview for the pilot episode of the televised novel *The Wire*, series creator Simon writes, “The whole [series] must make a cogent argument about the national condition, using the streets and stories of one city as a microcosm.” (2000, p.1). The ‘national condition’ of the poor and underemployed, and of those in socioeconomic distress is dire. A recent report by the non-partisan Congressional Research Service states, “U.S. income distribution appears to be among the most unequal of all major industrialized countries and the United States appears to be among the nations experiencing the greatest increases in measures of income,” (Semansky, 2013, p.1). *The Wire*, written by former *Baltimore Sun* police-beat reporter David Simon and co-creator and former policeman Ed Burns, uncovers those stories typically hidden from main-street U.S.A. Just as the wiretap from the fictional storyline uncovers details of undiscovered drug-related crimes, *The Wire* series presents an opportunity to discuss the uncovered lives of forgotten people, “the surplus population,” (Dickens, 1843) that live hidden as an under-reported crime of American neglect. Simon, recently remarked,

I think supply side economics has been shown to be bankrupt as an intellectual concept. It’s not only unproved, the opposite has occurred. If you’re looking at the divergence and the economic health of the middle class families, and the working class—what’s left of the working class, and certainly the underclass—you’re looking at where the wealth of the country is going and how fast. We are becoming two Americas in every fundamental sense, (Simon, 2014, 3:40).

Although undeniably a fictional representation of lived experience, characters and situations located across the series' sixty episodes and five seasons provides the space to delve deeply into foundational aspects of poverty, systemic distress and dysfunction for one American city and provides the opportunity to open up that conversation on a larger scale to one of national importance. Simon says of his work, "The last question we wanted to ask was if *The Wire* got any of this stuff right and this is really what cities are facing, then why is it that nobody's paying attention?" (Simon, 2008).

Why is a study of moral imagination in the service of social justice important? Writing in the late twentieth century about the AIDS epidemic, Greene's call for urgency rings particularly true in the face of poverty in twenty-first century America, "Excluding and demeaning great numbers of the population, we have not paid heed to what has been happening; we have not responded in time to a catastrophe that now endangers us all, no matter what our class or gender or ethnic origin," (1993, p.1). Children are disappearing—into poverty, suffering, and despair (Giroux, 2006) and into statistical reporting. For example, the sentence "21% of children in the United States live below the poverty line," (Fass, 2009) does not provide histories or knowledge of devalued lives of the children that the statistic describes.

If we don't see or hear about them other than through statistics they become the taken-for-granted. Out of sight, and out of mind. Scarry argues that

not fully imagining someone else as a real person makes it easier for human beings to carelessly harm each other; she writes “to tolerate others is to make room for them in one’s imagining,” (1998, p.55). Our current culture possessed by a menagerie of statistical averages renders entire groups of people as numerical data instead of thinking, feeling, breathing humans being. The tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice makes room in “one’s imagining” (Scarry, 1998, p.55) for the well-being of others.

I’m also interested in the potential of fictional representation to address issues of social justice, as a place to discover decisions involving the tool of moral imagination vicariously, and as a space to ponder actions and reactions of individuals. Simon says he ventured from journalistic narrative documenting fact to the television medium because the latter gives him the space to tell the stories between the numbers, (Gross, 2008). *The Wire*, in forcing its characters to acknowledge truths about each other, their institutions, and their city, overwhelmingly acknowledges “an America, at every level at war with itself,” (Moyers, 2009). “Fictional social critique in the form of the televisual novel can be a more effective medium than mainstream social science for revealing the spaces and people that capitalism has left behind,” (Parker, 2010). “*The Wire* presents a complex network of ‘micropower’ relations that transverse the institutions, subjects, and technologies of the urban racial milieu,” (Sharma, 2011, p.5) and in doing so provides the space to struggle with the facts and

figures around poverty, education, unemployment, and drug addiction. In supplementing fact with fiction, the interpretation of poverty in Baltimore presented by series writers becomes a part of viewers' experience, depicting harshly detailed consequences of human beings whose existence is often reduced by the news media to statistical averages leaving out shared histories and commonalities. Fiction gives us a way of grasping human situations that social science and surface reporting cannot. There is a manner in which fiction teaches us about the human condition that cannot be reduced to numbers; it allows individuals to grasp how other people think, feel, speak and act. Investing in story allows an individual to connect and create meaning in a way that numerical average does not.

Courses requiring viewing of *The Wire* series provides the basis of class discussions at Harvard, Duke, Middlebury College, UC-Berkeley, and UNC Greensboro, utilizing television as a novel, but moreover to discuss issues of urban inequality, democracy, and social justice. "In the face of a dominant belief system emphasizing personal inadequacies as the cause of poverty, *The Wire* effectively undermines such views by showing how the decisions people make are profoundly influenced by their environment or social circumstances," (Chaddha and Wilson, 2011). Utilizing the tool of moral imagination to explore the content of *The Wire* among the vast yet related issues of systemic dysfunction, race, politics, economics, homelessness, gender equality, and

education, among the “competing ambitions and vulnerabilities” (Simon, 2010) of media, consumption culture, and the dominancy of consumerism provides ample opportunity to interrogate issues we may encounter in our own lived experience to begin to ask critical questions. The purpose of this exploration is to encounter that of which Greene writes—“Those who can engage reflectively and authentically with the arts may be awakened in startling ways to the scars and flaws in our society and may be awakened to transform,” (2007, DV, p.1).

There are multiple interpretations gleaned from both in front of and behind the text of the series as viewers and writers, with connections in lived experience to which we might apply lessons uncovered through discussion of contrasting and adjoining interpretations. Consider recent headlines around the economic situation for the bankrupt city of Detroit, a city with a dwindling population just over 700,000 in 2012 that has lost a tax base of more than 300,00 in the last two decades presumably as a result of lost auto manufacturing jobs:

White House Detroit advisor says blight removal to ramp up...In June, the city said it had an estimated 66,000 vacant and blighted lots and 78,000 vacant structures...The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is allocating \$150 million to help Detroit fight blight, (Shepardson, 2013).

“The number of Americans living in poverty today has not been seen since Lyndon Johnson occupied the White House, and nowhere is it more visible

than in urban environments like Baltimore,” (Semansky, 2013). Prevalent themes found throughout *The Wire*—including those of poverty, homelessness, and unemployment—must be examined not only through statistics, facts, figures, and clearance rates, but by delving deeply and applying the tool of moral imagination to ensure equality and human dignity for all people. “You can’t depend on your eyes when your [moral] imagination is out of focus,” (Twain, 1917, p.439).

### **Making Sense of the Text**

Across sixty episodes viewers are invited to grasp the opportunity to discuss and discover how we, as human beings, are more alike than different, by looking at the actions of series’ characters and the systems and institutions around which a society propelled by consumerism functions. “In the past few decades, we’ve drifted from having a market economy to becoming market societies,” (Sandel, 2013) commodifying human lives in the process where almost everything is up for sale and market values begin to dominate individual lives. Simon explains the urgency, “The horror show is we are going to be slaves to profit. Some of us are going to be higher on the pyramid and we’ll count ourselves lucky and many, many more will be marginalized and destroyed,” (Moyers, 2014). This dissertation explores the theme of moral imagination in the service of social justice examining the tangle of disadvantage, poverty and inequality, and investigates the communication of social justice

issues found through using this series as a learning space. Dewey holds fast the concept that imagination is “the ability to look at things as if they could be otherwise,” (Greene, 2007, IB, p.1). Both Dewey and Greene seem to indicate that imagination is a way humans encounter and make sense of the world, and others identify imagination as vital and transformative to the act of creation. While imagination is indeed the larger umbrella for my work, I am aware that imagination also envelops a plethora of meanings including issues of fantasy, voyeurism, and dream-life. In this dissertation I am working within a concise definition that speaks to moral imagination as a tool to explore the limits and possibilities of social justice. Whereas fantasy might be the result of an individual’s inclination to escape reality, moral imagination helps to encounter lived experience and clears a path toward eliminating human oppression.

Exploring *The Wire* through themes of moral imagination in the service of social justice through a theoretical lens secured by the writings of Purpel, Greene, and Dewey exercises our ability to contemplate how people might better address issues of inequality and human dignity, ending oppression for everyone. My hermeneutic constructed out of their work offers a partial lens through which to interrogate and understand the text of *The Wire* in its complexity. I realize there are other ways to interpret this text, yet this interpretation is what seems particularly generative to me.



I also realize that viewers who encounter *The Wire* either through deliberate academic study or as escapist entertainment are not necessarily inclined to immediately emerge as practitioners wielding the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice. Viewers watch this and other television entertainment for multiple reasons and there is no guarantee that viewers of *The Wire* will walk away with the same lessons I examine through this exploration. Yet, using *The Wire* to unearth and interrogate my notion of moral imagination is important because the series brings to the discussion overarching issues of inequality and poverty that should be discussed in multiple venues in addition to the space of moral imagination in the service of social justice. My interrogation is meant to support and continue a conversation started by many concerned individuals around the state of poverty in the early twenty-first century. Because the hermeneutic is flexible and malleable, viewers may miss very salient and thought-provoking implications located within the storyline while absorbing those elements that reinscribe existing notions of race and bigotry; it is my viewpoint that prior to using the series as a teaching space, *The Wire* should be contextualized as a mechanism for uncovering lessons of moral imagination while still serving as an entertainment medium, and that potential stereotypical pitfalls should be called out and examined in the context of lived experience.

In an attempt to situate several philosophies of education within a realm of moral imagination, this dissertation compares and contrasts the writings of Purpel beside specific ideas pulled from Dewey's changing notion of truth and community, and Greene's concept of always in a state of becoming, and wide-awakeness. Purpel's outrage at the state of education in this country gains momentum when viewed alongside Dewey's purposeful view that each individual is important to the whole community because each individual experiences a truth different from another. The tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice also situates Dewey's notion of truth within a new light of moral outrage in the style of Purpel when we realize that all people do not matter in the current construction of our society and its systems.

Purpel's contribution to this examination shows that moral imagination is not a systematic and linear progression but instead holistic and circular, and explored as such exposes a truth that there are no easy answers for ending oppression and upholding human dignity; his brand of prophetic outrage screams against cruelty and all forms of injustice that parallels Simon's own. Purpel, himself a viewer of *The Wire* series, was perhaps drawn to it because it's premise reflects his insistence that we cast off denial and rationalization of actions that support the preponderance of a consumerist driven society that devalues lives one against the other. Adopting his habit of valuing the experience of each person and vowing to eliminate poverty and oppression, we

have a chance of moving toward a communal and supportive space that values the dignity of each individual and the right to live without unnecessary suffering. His assertion that education is “primarily a moral, cultural, and social endeavor,” (1999, p.3) positions the tool of moral imagination to be used as a teaching tool, and supports Greene’s dialectical approach.

Greene reflects that one must not distance oneself from people by viewing them as the Other, because to do so recreates acts of kindness into possible acts of pity and robs those actions of purpose. She says, “I am conscious of the tragic dimension in every human life,” (Ayers, 1998, p.207). Filtering her philosophy of becoming and wide-awakeness through the storylines created by Simon, underscores the angst and urgency around issues of poverty, oppression and systemic dysfunction because those issues are interwoven among historical experiences of job loss, terrorist attacks, inner-city decline, and the failure of the American education system. To separate oneself from the tragic dimension of American society presented through the storyline of *The Wire* means to sacrifice the possibility of having authorship—of having the ability to make a difference in the world—and with that “consciousness of freedom,” (Greene, 1988, p.22); we sacrifice our own freedom by ignoring histories like those presented through the text of *The Wire*. Echoing Dewey, Greene’s concept of freedom rests upon the notion that freedom for yourself does not come at the price of freedom for others; your own freedom cannot be bought at

the sacrifice of someone else's freedom. Her philosophy is integral for the tool of moral imagination in this regard and will be examined and reflected upon repeatedly throughout the chapters of this dissertation.

Dewey also compliments the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice through his notion of freedom in community. To have freedom is not simply having the liberty to do as one pleases, but instead is the idea that there exist protections for the benefit of all that intersect the lived experience of each individual.

The notion that men are equally free to act if only the same legal arrangements apply equally to all—irrespective of differences in education, in command of capital, and the control of the social environment which is furnished by the institution of property—is a pure absurdity, (Dewey, 2009).

Dewey's notion of a society that protects and upholds the dignity of all human beings does not run separate from the idea that each individual experiences the culture around her differently, and that each individual experience contributes to the health of the whole community. Greene's promise that each individual is always in a state of yet-to-be gives further strength to the notion that everybody matters. These philosophers and writers explore and pull apart what it means to be human and to live in community, as well as what it means to be responsible for others. Their writings form the foundation for a definition of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice and are

starting points for discussions to be expanded through the textual analysis of specific examples from *The Wire* series.

Why do seemingly intelligent, responsible, compassionate groups and individuals ignore the despair of fellow human beings? Purpel urges us to work against rationalization and even denial that accompanies self-interest, especially around issues of social justice, stating in his moral credo that “affirms the dignity of each person and the preciousness of life that emerges from a dedication to a just and loving community,” (1999, p.5). “Very few of us would be candid enough to acknowledge our own ideology centers on materialism, science, individuality and consumerism...yet the outcomes of our everyday actions demonstrate the sad truth,” (Purpel & McLaurin, 2004, p.191). Smiley and West add,

Love for us means everyone is worthy of a life of dignity and decency—just because. Not because of where they were born, who they know, where they live, where they were educated, where they work, or what the size of their annual income is. The sheer humanity of each and every one of us warrants our steadfast commitment to the well-being of each other, (2013, p.92).

Dewey among others proposes that the worthy journey emerges not as an actual trip, but in searching and seeing through different eyes all the while. *The Wire* provides a chance to look anew through the eyes of newspaper reporters and series writers, and also through the eyes of disparate characters with whom

we connect as well as with those we detest, to be surprised by the entanglements of moral imagination in the service of social justice, and to talk about—even to act to correct—the horrors of those in despair.

In season one, episode three, the mentally anguished character of D'Angelo Barksdale, played by Lawrence Gilliard, Jr., offers instruction around the game of chess, the game of drug-dealing, and ultimately the game of life on the street. It's a much talked about scene in the blogosphere, applying a street-smart explanation to these fictional characters' lived experience. (This excerpt is explored later in this dissertation.) The most (in)appropriate line for purposes of discussing the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice is voiced by another young drug dealer, Bodie, played by J.D. Williams, calling out D'Angelo's intrusion by asking, "Yo, why you give a shit?" (Simon, 2011). To access the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice means to...well...to give a shit.

The following themes are examined here through textual analysis of the spoken and written word and also through visual imagery to encounter theories and philosophies introduced in chapter two of this dissertation to further chisel and hone a definition of the tool of moral imagination. Themes present in *The Wire* that will be examined in support of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice are:

1. Everybody matters
2. A changing notion of truth
3. Banality and thoughtlessness
4. Beyond the taken for granted
5. Asking critical questions
6. People claiming responsibility

In addition to a cultural analysis using *The Wire* as text, I am also engaging in moral inquiry through philosophical and theoretical analysis of identifiable issues for social critique, and the implications for using these issues to open up space for critical questioning and discussions of human dignity and social justice. “The questions you ask are the essential starting point for any textual analysis,” (McKee, 2003, p. 76). My research question begins as: can the tool of moral imagination in consideration of social justice issues be illustrated and understood by incorporating a fictionalized television drama as backdrop? Can inquiry into urgent, critical issues be explored through a fictionalized serial television drama?

This methodology of textual analysis of a five-season televised series will pick out the pieces of the whole picture that address the topic of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice and will not try to tackle the series as a whole, or even one season. “Post-structuralist textual analysis is more interested in trying to recover information about practices of sense-making in

culture more generally so there is no need to study every element of every text for every question, (McKee, 2003, p. 75).” Examples included throughout this dissertation are not cited in chronological order, but rather in an order which supports and addresses six qualities of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice that I have defined according to specific points pulled from the writings of Dewey, Greene and Purpel. I’ve included a list of themes and supporting examples in each theme as Appendix A.

Textual analysis, though not a precise numeric scientific methodology, (McKee, 2003, p. 119), is particularly useful for this project of uncovering and revealing the stories between the statistics; post-structuralist textual analysis depends upon the existing situation and knowledge of the researcher—in other words, the lived experience of the researcher. Using *The Wire* as a basis for textual analysis to uncover threads of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice opens up space for discussions to uncover more of where our own experiences intersect because the method so thoroughly depends on individual interpretations of the text. To really get at the wide berth of possible solutions, a whole new set of questions has to be pondered, (Langer, 1954), and in this case a whole new set of critical questions must be asked. Textual analysis acts as a catalyst for producing critical questions.

Although I am interpreting and analyzing *The Wire* text using a media studies hermeneutic through sight, sound and image, I am approaching the



series from a perspective focused on specific components of moral imagination pulled from the work of Purpel, Greene and Dewey; the use of media studies elements such as dialogue, camera angle, camera frame, and diegetic noise are necessary elements of any discussion around televised drama. A textual analysis using the tool of moral imagination is not just an interrogation between fictionalized characters, but between actors and their surroundings, between viewers and their surroundings, between the writer and script, and between viewers and the cumulative televised efforts of the production team and acting talent. This textual analysis as a methodology does not discuss the artistic merits of *The Wire* per se (and they are many although the series was repeatedly overlooked for awards), but rather looks at *The Wire* as lessons for humankind into understanding the non-linearity of the issue of poverty in the United States with all its social and economic implications. Reading and interpreting the script, viewing the series repeatedly, and delving into digitized interviews with series actors, writers and directors are all incorporated into this textual analysis methodology, borrowing artistic elements descriptions in addition to digging into the spoken and written language of characters.

After initially viewing the entire series with a headset and closed captioning turned on to catch the carefully crafted and precise dialogue, (incorrectly interpreted multiple times on HBO Go) and instinctively knowing that the series had a lot to say, I listened for and took note of expressions of

community and connectivity. I was especially intrigued by the multiple instances of people teaching other people not only in season four, which centers around the theme of education, but throughout the series. As I researched and transcribed dialogue, translating the camera work through my own observations, I sorted characters, situations and themes across a wide spectrum before arriving at the present six thematic groupings. Always resonating with the work of Dewey and Greene throughout my studies, Purpel's presence came alive for me through watching the series and through my research into the public speeches, interviews, and writings of *The Wire* series' creator, David Simon.

### **Textual Analysis: Limits and Possibilities**

Investigating the tool of moral imagination through a series like *The Wire* is fraught with dilemma. First, there is the notion that the series is only adding to an urban stereotype wrought with crime and drug use. Secondly, the idea that many are drawn to the series almost as television tourists to vicariously witness the exoticness of inner-city experience from a safe distance. I recognize the series is problematic from the epistemologies of post colonialism and racial and gender stereotypes, but presents opportunities for multiple perspectives for positive discussions drawn from those areas as well.

Admittedly, this researcher lacks the significant experience of day-to-day survival in an inner-city, economically depressed, drug-infested environment

which is the setting for *The Wire* series, and is also the real-life setting for thousands of Baltimore residents.

A biennial census of Baltimore's homeless population that is mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development counted over 4,000 homeless people in 2011. Some choose to find shelter in the city's estimated 16,000 buildings that are vacant or abandoned, (Semansky, 2013).

I do not pretend to know or experience what it might be like to live among the abandoned row houses of inner city Baltimore or any other urban economically depressed neighborhood. “The fact that human consciousness—the process of meaning-making—is involved necessarily alters the results of experiments into the human mind,” (McKee, 2003, p. 120). Meaning-making through textual analysis is particular to an individual and to the circumstances in which the individual is situated at the time of processing.

My observations viewing and reflecting upon this series are the results of hours and hours of watching, as well as weeks and months of talking with others and observing and interacting with social media and other digital sources of series’ writer’s talks and appearances. The point of this textual analysis is not to identify solutions to the aforementioned problems of systemic dysfunction, but to situate the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice alongside these issues describing the two Americas, to discuss the non-linearity of a conceptual development of the tool of moral imagination, and to identify

commonalities that cross economic, racial, and physical boundaries. As a first-time viewer of the series, and having missed its initial weekly HBO run, I have now watched the series beginning to end, without a week between episodes, repeatedly and on multiple occasions. I found the experience overwhelming and introspective at the same time; this style of 'speed reading' positions me to connect the dots more quickly, although the value of reflection had to be self-imposed, mentally resting for several days between seasons not only to reflect and process the multiple layering of storylines, plot elements, and character evolutions, but to connect and empathetically experience this modern day heart-of-darkness tale with fresh eyes.

In academic journals and critical dialogues discussing *The Wire*, race is often assumed and class becomes the dominant theme of the discussion, (Sharma, 2011, p.5). However, Greene writes "a postcolonial pragmatic pedagogy must engage with the thorny issues of cultural stereotyping, imbalances of power, and the critical analysis of biased representation," (Jones, 2011, p.219). Such is the presentation of race within the televised serial *The Wire*; the cast is comprised predominantly of darker skinned actors and writers and directors predominantly lighter skinned, with the exception of season five. This dissertation does not specify the race of every individual mentioned and although race is not the subject of this dissertation, neither can it be ignored when exploring the issues of social justice with the tool of moral imagination; it is

worth noting that African-American characters are distributed across economic divides in this fictionalized series, as well as institutional and bureaucratic offices, and within the layers of power for the drug trade as well. The same is true for characters with lighter skin colors; they are distributed across economic divides in each of five seasons.

Referring to African-American and other dark-skinned actors, Frankie Faison, who plays Baltimore Police Commissioner Evan Burrell, reflects, “Very rarely do we get a platform in which we can demonstrate such a wide range of who we are, whether it’s someone dependent on drugs or whether it’s a law enforcement officer, or whether it’s a major drug dealer,” or an attorney, caring teacher, or grieving mother (Simon, 2011); Lance Reddick, who plays the quietly suffering yet opportunistic Lieutenant Daniels goes on to say, “What is not typical of Hollywood is to show black people as drug dealers who are criminal geniuses,” (Simon, 2011). Simon’s character development across racial lines works to overcome notions of stereotype, and to help the viewer situate story outside of a cookie-cutter approach where characters are shaped from the same rough mold.

*The Wire*, a show about important issues of serious poverty and urban neglect, systemic dysfunction, inequality, and failure of the education system—all issues that affect African-American and other Baltimore populations, does not hammer hard on the topic of race apart from the systemic dysfunctions that

create economic inequality. It attempts to navigate race relations by presenting a wide range of characters. Simon reflects on his own experience living in the City of Baltimore:

A lot of this falls on people of color because they're the last in on the economic ladder, and if you look at the city where I live, if you look at Baltimore Maryland, half of the adult male African American residents have no work...That's an economic system that is throwing away, and doesn't need ten to fifteen percent of its population...and we're letting them know, (Moyers, 2014).

*The Wire* illustrates how views of race and stereotype are inextricably linked to issues of poverty and oppression set up throughout institutions and systems of education and communication. The topic of race is not hidden in this series; at one point in season three, Councilman Tommy Carcetti campaigning for mayor quips, "I still wake up white in a city that ain't," (Simon, 2011). The series' focus on issues of social justice like inequality, poverty, and systemic neglect is not limited to one race but is instead shown across a different demographic: class.

The normalization of blackness and 'making whiteness strange,' is progressive in terms of the politics of representation, but the theoretical effort of these deconstructions makes race either marginal or invisible to the politics of the shows...It is vital to examine how in *The Wire* race does not disappear in some form of post-racist conjuncture, but remains politically significant, not necessarily just at the level of signification, but inscribed centrally into the works of social power and control, (Sharma, 2011, p.5).

Though viewers may also be lured toward the series for aspects of voyeurism and exoticness, *The Wire* also provides a space to step away from those notions and as Greene suggests to “DO post colonialism,” (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001, p.viii) by examining the text through cross-racial issues of poverty, drug addiction, joblessness, and systemic dysfunction. She writes,

Using and clarifying the once esoteric term, *post colonialism*, [Dimitriadis and McCarthy] point to the dramatic changes in the way the once colonized have begun to view themselves and their past suffering. At once, the authors call on us in the once self-satisfied West to acknowledge the depth and complexity of intersecting histories and streams of thought, (p.vii).

Such is the case presented by predominantly black cast and predominantly white writers and directors through the intersecting histories of *The Wire*.

### **Voyeurism**

Admittedly, there is a temptation to delve into this series because it represents taboo and perhaps augments a persuasive hypervisual notion of urban-ness; we expect only to see street thugs, sexual exploitation, car and foot chases, poverty and despair. Instead of violent street thugs, viewers quickly learn of innumerable instances of humanness and perseverance that quickly glue them to the storyline. *The Wire* is not a fast-paced action series glorifying violence and brutality, but a methodical compilation of holistic storytelling highlighting instances of humanity amidst violent and brutal treatments. Following in the steps of HBO hits like *The Sopranos*, and preceding Simon's

other critically acclaimed, historical-fiction series *Tréme*, the ability to experience vicariously through characters and situations presented within the storyline cannot be ignored and represents a sort of television tourism. Furthermore, the audience garnered by the series is still increasing.

A simple search on YouTube and Twitter sites using the term “The Wire” will turn up millions of hits, searching #TheWire turns up almost forty thousand Twitter and Instagram messages, (neither of these software platforms was in wide use during the series’ original run making those search results all the more impressive). It is possible to find very recent comments on many things having to do with *The Wire*, particularly because David Simon is very present and still on the speaker circuit drawing attention to economic injustice—the two Americas—that is also prevalent around the globe.

Another voyeuristic component of viewing *The Wire* in 2014 is viewers’ ability to actually move through the streets of Baltimore through Google Maps “street view” mode. Instead of being staged on a studio lot, *The Wire* features an actual city set caught between shades of grandeur and decline, mirroring the ever-present class dichotomies and influencing the fates of series characters and situations. A trip to the city of Baltimore through Google Maps is amazing in its detail, providing the ability to go directly to corners mentioned in the series like Division and Gold, or to wander around the streets and boarded up houses of the Westside neighborhoods. The images also show people camping out on



corners and in front of abandoned row houses; these people are not actors. The Google Maps images from August 2012, show a city scape still in various states of becoming and disrepair, there is even a internet published self-guided driving tour of all filming locations in Baltimore, including relevant cautionary instructions reminding tourists that this version of *The Wire* experience is real and involves neighborhoods still in states of disrepair and infested with the drug trade. The connections between *The Wire* series and lived experience in Baltimore is very present, one only has to open an Internet browser to find them.

### **Chapter Mapping**

In the following chapters of this dissertation I will map out my plan for investigating and presenting an analysis of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice. Throughout my analysis and interpretation of the writings and viewpoints of Purpel, Greene, and Dewey, I will consider how *The Wire* becomes a jumping off point for a wider consideration of how the tool of moral imagination might intersect with issues of social justice in educating for greater equality within the human condition, and above all else to create a higher bar against which to aim to preserve human lives.

The chapters in this dissertation provide the foundation for an examination of systemic complexities inherent to decision making, utilizing applicable situations and characterizations presented through the televised novel of *The Wire*. Although a fictional accounting, it is entirely plausible that

these situations might occur in some form; Simon states that many of the characters and events in the series are taken from his reporting days, (2009). I have noted this in a couple of instances in chapters three and four.

Following the introductory chapter, chapter two uses specific philosophical lenses drawn from the writings of Purpel, Greene, and Dewey to provide the foundation for a thorough examination of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice from multiple perspectives. Purpel writes that a basic sense of story and critical consciousness is liberating to a viewer because it forces us to remember and recognize that the origins of events are “rooted in human events,” (1989, p. 126). Harnessing *The Wire* to illustrate academic theory encourages connection of concepts to events and situations involving human beings without which we may not be able to grasp as completely.

Chapters three and four analyze key characterizations and situational representations from the text of *The Wire* to follow the connections made from a fictional world to lived experience to create, encounter, expose and identify the cultural shadows and deep crevices that shape and mold the everyday—attempting to define the space where it is a given that if someone “has” someone else “has not.” Chapter three focuses analysis on examples that illustrate three themes integral to my definition of the tool of moral imagination used in the service of social justice: (1) an agreement that the experience of

each person matters to the experience of the whole; (2) the idea that truths change from person to person and in doing so, effects truths for the whole and for each other; and (3) the necessity of a struggle against actions of thoughtlessness and banality. Observing the systemic complexities that effect lived experience impact the circumstances in which moral imagination can thrive, the fictional space of *The Wire* is a relevant and useful way to study the tool of moral imagination within the context of a contemporary American life that is wrought with complicated choices, hidden agendas and outcomes, and dominant ideologies. A discussion around instances located in the fictional space of *The Wire* provides the real-life space to talk about things we may not encounter in our day-to-day lived experience, but which we should never ignore by pretending those situations and experiences do not exist somewhere for others.

Veering away from actions undertaken without thoughtful consideration of the value of human dignity within that interaction, or reading statistics without examining the truths behind those statistics, runs the risk of eliminating any evidence of human compassion in the process. The tool of moral imagination might be used to push aside thoughtlessness from lived experience by: (1) clearing the path for us to look at truths with fresh eyes; (2) to ask critical questions that lead to different spaces; and (3) to claim responsibility for the lives of others. These aspects are more closely examined in chapter four, as

invaluable compliments in a definition of the tool of moral imagination in full consideration around issues of inequality and elimination of human suffering.

The last chapter of the dissertation provides a final reflection on the tool of moral imagination as a tool for connection, overcoming fragmentation, and binary thinking in social justice issues of inequality and oppression. Serious societal themes continually emerge from *The Wire* series: meaningful work, race relations, hate crime, government corruption, institutional corruption, institutional failings, economic systemic dysfunction, the role of music, the prison system, continuous surveillance, language, overcoming stereotype, women's roles, and use of sexuality. Underscoring all of these themes is the notion of the experiment of democracy in the urban setting, and on the flip side, the failure of our democracy—a hidden alter-image that is too easily ignored unless constantly brought to the surface for discussion. Throughout the series Simon creates a sense of empathy around his fictional characters, and in doing so creates empathy in the viewer. He's even said that this may be his ultimate goal with the series (Moyers, 2009), to produce empathy, acknowledgement, and compassion from the viewer. Treating *The Wire* not as a predictable serialized police crime drama, but as a love letter to the American people, Simon's societal wiretap uncovers not the version we want to acknowledge and replicate, but a by-product of consumerist culture to be exposed nevertheless.

Simon conceived the series beginning-to-end as five seasons to tell the stories between the statistics and facts appearing in newspaper headlines, and in their telling to recount the details, circumstances, and trajectories of the lived experience behind the statistics. He's also depicting a story of how those same statistics are manipulated to suit privilege and power. As applied to education in season four of *The Wire*, the results are beyond disastrous. If education should be the communication or transmission of our human-ness, of caring what happens to the group called community, by cheating the system schools do not communicate anything to students about what it means to be human. Not only are tax dollars for public education wasted, children's well-being and their ability to find meaningful work as adults is compromised. Shapiro concurs,

What is being lost, as we flatten out the extraordinarily complex world of human growth and understanding and reduce it to the crudity and simplicity of a few digits on a school report or the assessment of a school system's adequacy, are any real references to the joy of learning, or the capacity to engage knowledge as the means to live as more discerning, engaged, and conscientious members of the human community, (2006, p.13).

Facts and figures not only leave out the stories of lived experience, they also leave out any reference to teaching students how to work with the tool of moral imagination or pointing to the necessity of asking critical questions as key to eliminating unnecessary suffering.

*The Wire*, viewed as a visual serial novel, offers its viewers the chance to examine and discuss some of the situations with which they may not otherwise come in contact. Though not in any way comparable with the real lived experiences of those depicted through the storylines, *The Wire* does offer a glimpse—a space for inquiry and introspection—into commonalities where we have the opportunity to engage. Acts in consideration of impact to others—acts using the tool of moral imagination—are found across racial, gender, sexual, and socio-economic differentiators. When market values enter our lived experience and lives are valued monetarily, the meanings and norms of those lives are changed, and practices that support devaluation of human lives begin to crowd out the tool of moral imagination (Sandel, 2013). When market forces enter individual lived experience as they have in our twenty-first century culture and within the fictional representations located within *The Wire*, it is people who become responsible for countering consumerist culture. Moral imagination becomes the tool through which we might better protect human lives from commodification. The value then, of acting with the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice provides new meaning for what it means to educate, and should be considered the thread that holds the facts together in the same way that Simon weaves story into real-life circumstance and happenings from his days as a reporter of facts for the newspaper.

Claiming responsibility for others requires the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice to recognize that as members of the human race, we are indeed responsible to take steps to end the suffering for people we do not even know. It is only when we concede that the family of the woman who works two jobs yet cannot make ends-meet is part of everyone's responsibility that we have any hope of evolving toward a biological predisposition toward instinctively utilizing the tool of moral imagination (Marcuse, 1969). To visually, yet vicariously encounter the squalor of poverty, the tragedy of the drug trade, the effects of corruption, and the sadness of schools as processing centers provides a chance to uncover the disappearing stories behind the statistics. We are all caught in the crossfire, not of street-corner gunfire, but of economic disadvantage, of educational dysfunction, and of hateful racial, gender and sexual bias. We are each a part of the others lived experience. There is always a choice to act or do nothing, but a choice involving the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice means that preserving human dignity becomes a mandate. Simon's comment should become a new definition for our role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; "A country that doesn't recognize its problems—much less make any serious attempt to solve them"—is in trouble. Getting angry about this stuff "is not a bad place to be," (2009).

*The Wire* maps out connections not only between drug dealers, but also between the law-abiding citizens that live in the same vicinity. We are all on the

same wire—there is more than a physical wire that connects one human to another; we’re all pulling energy off of the same grid. We are connected to the horrors in unsheltered lives, and each one of us has a responsibility to engage the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice, to look out for each other, and to give a shit. The more this is practiced, the more it becomes a part of the new normal; it becomes a habit. An evolutionary prediction of humans caring for each other (Marcuse, 1969) will not happen by circumstance, but through continuous struggle with and teaching uses for the tool of moral imagination through discussion and practice. The series mantra is divulged during an explanation of the wiretap setup in episode six, “All the pieces matter,” (Simon, 2011). Yet as viewers come to realize, not all stories are heard. “We’ve become contemptuous of the idea that we’re all in this together,” says Simon, (Moyers, 2014). Utilizing the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice to analyze *The Wire* provides a starting point for us to discuss remodeling our society to reflect a common respect and responsibility for all people.



## CHAPTER II

### PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom,” the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Shaul, 1970, p.15).

We must mend what has been torn apart, make justice imaginable again give happiness a meaning once more, (Camus, 1968, p.135).

Analysis of *The Wire* as a mythological work presents an array of situation, character, and allegory against which to investigate and tease apart instances of moral imagination in the service of social justice against backdrops that resonate across lived experience. Though presented against an economically depressed, inner-city environment not encountered by all American citizens, the overarching themes of big business, mass media, democracy, and education depicted through struggles of people living within those circumstances created by violent collapse of systemic support systems resonate loudly across demographics. Moreover, the perceived value placed on the lives of children and the poorest citizens in *The Wire* also provides a

platform to speak from a place of moral outrage around institutional dysfunction and crumbling of communities amidst pursuit of unparalleled wealth for a few.

Contemplating this type of inquiry alongside a definition of moral imagination as a navigational tool and within a textual analysis of this serialized television production “makes possible a vision at once imaginative and historical where what is also includes the thought of that which is not—and even that which should be,” (Anderson, 2012, p.86). Series author David Simon says this is possible because in addition to “offering multiple meanings and arguments,” it is a drama with “larger, universal themes that have more to do with the human condition, the nature of the American city and, indeed, the national culture,” (2000, p.2). Undeniably a fictionalized account, *The Wire* also captures “a view that is laced with contradictory perspectives on the meanings of citizenship, capital-labor relations and justice, and on the sources and workings of power in the urban order,” (Kennedy & Shapiro, 2012, p.2). It is a text rich with episodes of wide-awakeness, networks of extensive and responsible community, and characters who voice clear and often unexpected contempt embracing moral outrage. Approaching Sartre’s existential premise of an individual’s responsibility within the whole and the whole to the individual (1947), stories located along *The Wire* are not so much tales of individual angst and triumph, but are together adjoining and interrelated pieces and have to be treated as such.

This chapter discusses the approaches of three significant twentieth century philosophers that provide the cornerstones of a carefully crafted definition of moral imagination: John Dewey, Maxine Greene, and David Purpel. Dewey addresses a concept of living most fully through living in community; Greene's existential concern is how to be the most fully human through wide-awakeness; likewise, Purpel's action and spiritual concern for humanity also provide applications for the tool of moral imagination. "All the pieces matter," (Simon, 2011), not only in *The Wire* as a serialized fictional depiction of urban life, but in the contributions of these chosen theorists to a careful construction of moral imagination as a tool to help repair a broken world.

One of John Dewey's applicable components for a discussion of moral imagination is how to live most completely in community—a community not limited to physical locale, but instead reaching through forms of communication forward, backward, and outward drawing connections through time and across populations. Dewey's notion of truth in community as ever-changing and unique to an individual's experience provides an additional contemplative structure for the tool of moral imagination within community because it sustains a pragmatic notion of an individual in flux and constantly changing in response to stimuli.

Dewey's notion of an altering truth also accommodates Greene's concept of unfinishedness, and leans toward discussions of wide-awakeness. The centrality of Greene's appeal accesses substantial discussion topics of social

justice through the arts and literature; incorporating her methodology into critical inquiry which utilizes a dramatized series made for television lends another level of depth to this dissertation because I not only build around her necessity of remaining wide-awake to the human condition but also borrow her methodological approach accessing real world concerns using a fictional, aesthetic backdrop as a conversational starting point.

David Purpel's passion and action continually orbits a vision of repairing a world gone awry yet not without hope. However, it is Purpel's spiritual concern for search and meaning in this world and acknowledged within each person that bring about his prophetic insistence for social justice. His devotion to the care and condition of each human being is a supporting component of moral imagination speaking to his overarching campaign to repair the world, and will be important in my later analysis of *The Wire*.

I will also augment a definition of moral imagination utilizing a brief discussion of Arendt's banality of evil, primarily for the purpose of introducing a darker side of imagination into an area where it can be pushed around and talked about as it relates to a concept of wide-awakeness within community and the everyday lived existence of the people and institutions that form that community.

I've chosen particular insights from these philosophers because each values the potential of education as a tool for repairing societal inequalities.

Their writing also resonates with my personal interest of how moral imagination connects or disconnects us to or from others. Using Dewey's concept of an unfinished world that stretches across history also lends a specific religious purpose to this quest that all is not lost. The end of this chapter introduces and defines my concept of moral imagination, using these theorists as a foundation and also begins to introduce how this application of moral imagination might be identified through textual analysis of the televised serial *The Wire*.

This approach by no means exhausts the contribution each of the theorists makes toward the scholarship of community, education, or moral imagination. Keep in mind my intention is not to completely encounter Dewey's extensive work on community, Greene's concern for the human condition, or even to completely reveal Purpel's prophetic passion for education. My concern is a tug of war with moral imagination as it is applied within this television series, and I use these theorists as the foundation upon which to begin that discussion, grounded in the textual analysis of a fictional work. This dissertation clears one path for a discussion of moral imagination revealed searching with fresh eyes.

### **John Dewey**

How shall the young become acquainted with the past in such a way that the acquaintance is a potent agent in appreciation of the living present? (Dewey, 1938, p.23).

Dewey believed humans reach the fullest potential of individual capabilities in community with others. He defines community as more than a physically inhabited space, but as a continual connection of experience from the past into the present, and through hope into the future. Specifically, Dewey's "concern for experience in the changing contexts" (Greene, 1988, p.43) of community, revealed his intent that the truth of experience within community changes from person to person and becomes the basis of reform. Throughout Dewey's writings about education is emphasized the value of communication in all of its forms to community, the role of community in the process of education, and the connections that exists between communication, community, and education. He explains here,

The communication which insures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions—like ways of responding to expectations and requirements. Persons do not become a society by living in physical proximity...A book or letter may institute a more intimate association between human beings separated thousands of miles from each other than exists between dwellers under the same roof. (1916, pp.4-5).

For Dewey, community also seems to constitute a responsibility—not a choice, but an ingrained, purposeful intent to support the life of the whole. Decisions to ignore communal opportunity or cease efforts to amend social problems are, "to betray the nature and those who have given us the luxury and responsibility of this decision," (Fishman & McCarthy, p.7). Dewey's perceptual

disclosure that truth continually changes for each individual and fluctuates around individual experience situated within a community expands a discussion of community toward pragmatic inclusion of everyday lived experience. His concepts of the individual and community are inextricably linked. He writes, “while singular beings in their singularity think, want, and decide what they think and strive for, the content of their beliefs and intentions is a subject matter provided by association,” (1927/1954, p.25). Exploration into the unknown must be extended by values and meanings drawn from community through risky, conscious investigation. It is only by continually, consciously exploring situation within community that “we find ourselves,” (Greene, 1988, p.125).

For Dewey, the experience of being and becoming in community requires the skill of evaluating individual desires with respect for consequence to others of acting on those desires. He proposes that “our individual and shared capacity to critically interrogate existing reality is most fruitfully developed in the context of a self-conscious commitment to the ongoing enrichment of lived experience,” (Kadlec, 2007, p.13) within a community. Dewey’s contention that we live most fully as part of community must also be accompanied by a responsibility toward the members of that community; the process of human interpretation is not solely the result of individual introspection but also happens through the process of interaction with surroundings. For Dewey, individual truths become

inseparable from the constantly changing community; truth is tentative, never static, and continually reinterprets itself.

Dewey's conceptualization of community supports a view of moral imagination where human oppression might be constantly confronted, where people experience and learn from each other, and where individuals perpetually uphold a responsibility to something greater than self. To be sure, hearing another's response to thoughts and reflections and responding to those perceptions happens in communicative exchange; the exchange might be contemplated as an emerging environment where sense of self is examined and expanded by interaction with others. The tool of moral imagination exposes those connections that we share with one another. More recent commentators have noted that "Imagination is the brain's tool through which humans seek connection to something *outside* of self," (Rose, 2012). Through these interpretations of everyday experience humans develop a sense of self, because the brain—whose main function is to ensure survival—constantly attempts to make sense of the world around us, to anticipate danger, and to look for places to evolve, (Zakrajsek & Loeb, 2012). Biologically, imagination is a survivalist instinct which might be described "to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected," (Greene, 1995, p.28) that we might anticipate and renegotiate dangerous encounters, and a way to forge community. For Dewey, community provides an influential space for education that supports opportunity



and growth, and holds an interpretation of truth that although individually unique is wrapped around specific shared points of view.

The principle that development of [individual] experience comes about through interaction means that education is essentially a social process. This quality is realized in the degree in which individuals form a community group, (Dewey, 1938, p.58).

### **Dewey's Aesthetic Interpretation**

Individual expression interacts with community through sensory interpretation—making sense of experience. Dewey explains, “The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation,” (1916, p. 408) through choice of action erupting from continuous sensory input. Decisions to act should involve the tool of moral imagination to uproot those impulses that are oppressive to self or others. For Dewey, the possibility of discovering these instances lies both within and beyond cultural boundaries, existing alongside extant opportunities for community located far away from the cultural fence and accessed through history. Foreshadowing Greene and others, Dewey says these instances might be explored through aesthetic interpretation of histories accessed through art and literature, (1934).

Honed by individual experience, the tool of moral imagination enables us to discover the possibilities of human growth and the oppressive cultural suffocation that has the overarching effect to “isolate and preclude...social intelligence,” (Kadlec, 2004, p. 6). “Dewey argues that all knowledge is the

product of a dynamic interaction between the knower and the known that belies any notion of a private interior realm apart from the world it inhabits,” (p.17).

Dewey’s notion of truth, for individuals and groups, might be uncovered by deliberately teasing apart discussions of communal interactions with the tool of moral imagination that makes evident social domination, inequality, and injustice. This would make it possible to see the way ideology controls and disturbs our understanding of the world.

Though Dewey often shies away from explicitly calling for an angry response to human oppression, he does compellingly call for the individual to understand her place in community in order to become a more fully participating and transformative member of society, as a militant responsibility to a “common faith” in humanity that might become more steadfast and purposeful. He writes,

Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it...the common faith of mankind. It remains to make it explicit and militant, (1991, p.87).

“The individual comes to a more sophisticated and transformative understanding of herself and society once she is able to see how her activities affect and are affected by others around her,” (Kadlec, p. 68). Dewey seems to take for granted that once this communicative learning occurs, the resulting actions of the individual will value human dignity. To be sure, moral imagination plays with

this interpretation of Dewey's notion of communication as education; to believe an individual's commitment to community seamlessly takes into account the effects of all actions upon the humanity of others does not leave room for oversight. Human beings want to believe in an inherent notion of good; we want to believe that we are doing the right thing.

Dewey's hopeful response to the role of community as the way of living together points to a world where moral imagination is habitually employed. His vision of education makes us aware of human interdependence and connection. The whole point of education for Dewey is to create the conditions that enable us to see and live the meaning of a democratic social existence. This education expands our moral awareness of human worth and human connectedness—the vital contribution that each makes to the whole.

### **Communication Is Education**

Dewey's foundational belief is that ideas and products communicated within a community have the potential to educate. In a fast-paced, remote-controlled world filled with automatic robotic response, Dewey's continuous educational dilemma might be teased apart to discuss acknowledgement of the past in such a way that the resulting knowledge becomes relevant to the present (1916). He says the best we can hope for in a world that is constantly changing, is to develop "the kinds of skills, capacities, and dispositions that allow us to tap into the critical potential of lived experience," (Kadlec, p. 28). Moral imagination

might be utilized toward this purpose. Dewey discussed the idea that community does not solely exist in a physical space, but also through books and aesthetic experience. Yet, he also writes, “the belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative,” (1938, p. 25). Kadlec, a political scientist and Deweyan scholar, describes this approach as indeed transformative in essence. Although not an outright call for outrage and action, “through education the individual learns to share in ‘conjoint activity,’” and thereby becomes more and more “saturated with an understanding of the nature and meaning of communication...once she is able to see how her activities affect and are affected by those around her,” (p. 68). Participating in Dewey’s educative community, the individual becomes aware that to be in community requires the communication to uphold human dignity for all. Dewey’s moral imagination is one that highlights the dignity and value of each participant in our social world.

There are examples of lived experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries where living in community produced disastrous consequences in examples found in the genocide of European Jews by the Nazis during World War II, or the ethnic cleansings of Bosnia and Rwanda. “In its corrective function, moral imagination gives depth to retroactive assessment of past mistakes in evaluating possibilities,” (Fesmire, p. 64). Applying Dewey’s view of community stretching across time and place, these histories become part of our own communities by

connecting shared stories. We begin to begin to contemplate the impact to our own history where realizations are acknowledged around communities of people who enacted atrocities upon other members of a community. Furthermore, discussions of aggressive group actions that reveal creative actions imply those actions lacked the guidance of moral imagination especially in the service of social justice where support and affirmation of human lives lived in conjunction with others becomes a mandate.

Although the essence of Dewey's situation of the individual within community is social, evolving from a position that also involves the positions of others within the same space, his call for action seems to slightly mellow as it approaches a transformative aspect of the acquired knowledge. Because of a constant emphasis on democracy, Dewey's concept of communication as educative includes the realization that social must also consciously involve the valuation of another's well-being. To be sure, the attraction in Dewey's philosophical pondering is the nod to a productive community that continually strives to uphold the dignity of all participants. For reasons not contemplated in this discussion, Dewey seems not to dwell on the dark side of community in his writing, but perhaps holds tightly toward a human inclination to value all human lives—a purpose toward which humans might naturally evolve without intervention. I will further explore the darker side of community and the role of moral imagination to that inquiry in chapters three and four.

Dewey thought humans should reach for “stability of character without stasis,” (Fesmire, 2003, p.15) of action or habit and is influenced by actions involving the tool of moral imagination. His statements that humans live best in community resonate across cultures, and his providence for communication as education can and should be aptly applied to any discussion of the tool of moral imagination, particularly in the often mind-numbing experience of aesthetic overload in the 21<sup>st</sup> century community. Dewey’s contribution to my own work is about understanding self not only as a part of community, but as self in a constantly changing relationship within community. Dewey’s relationship of self to community is one that sees our vital relationship to one another as well.

### **Maxine Greene**

Consciousness doesn't come automatically; it comes through being alive, awake, curious, and often furious. – (Greene, 2008).

Greene’s contributions to moral imagination echo Dewey’s notion of community in a constant state of becoming where “collaborative activity whose consequences are appreciated as good,” (Greene, 1995, p.66) are consciously realized by participants and also shared so that people wish to continue that way of becoming. Greene doesn’t describe a preferred activity here, only concepts that are shared with others who are open to discussing them. Sharing occurs through the dialectic, “and attending...not merely contemplating. It is to come to

know in ways that might bring about change,” (p. 68) in our own institutions, neighborhoods, and communities to uphold human dignity for all.

The key concept discussed by Greene that contributes to my definition of moral imagination entails a desire to remain in a state of wide-awakeness, of consciously acknowledging one’s place in and responsibility to a community that is itself in a constant state of becoming. She supports living the most fully human life possible through her existential perspectives on wide-awakeness—for choosing and actively being in the world that is also in a state of becoming. To live most fully for Greene is to make moral choices and she looks to the possibilities in becoming, stating on more than one occasion in her writing and presentations, “I am what I am not yet.” Ascribing to pragmatist leanings, she echoes that human beings are not predetermined or fixed within experience but exist in a constant state of becoming. Greene’s interest accesses discussions through arts and literature using moral imagination to clear the way for how best to consistently promote wide-awakeness that acknowledges and encounters the world outside of routine and habitual acceptance.

Additionally, Greene also juxtaposes wide-awakeness with taken-for-grantedness, describing the latter as a condition where people do not question customs, codes, and internal images nor the implications and influence that encountering these communications has on everyday lived experience, (1995, p. 71). She encourages humans to make choices through naming and resisting

obstacles, being passionate and authentic about one's life course and goals, maintaining a belief in possibility, and achieving a state of self-consciousness in relationship to self and in relationship to others. She writes, "I use the term *wide-awakeness*...without the ability to think about yourself, to reflect on your life, there's really no awareness, no consciousness," (2008, p.2) Greene vehemently postulates that consciousness arrives for humans through becoming curious—even furious—about the condition of others with whom the world is shared.

For Greene, practicing wide-awakeness guides people to form questions focusing on states of being that are "oppressive, mindless, and wrong," (1978, p.9) because wide-awakeness requires a sharing of lived experience, of hearing the multiplicity of voices—especially those that are silenced and devalued—and a new experience of self-awareness. This recognition, Greene says, is not necessarily a state encountered by all people. Self-awareness and the existential questioning of what makes us more fully human, forces us to encounter questions to which no precise answer exists. Many people do not share a habit of constantly and perpetually questioning, shaping and reshaping their ability to pose the right questions. Yet by doing so, one day the 'why' arises out of self-awareness and the habit of questioning surfaces. For Greene, this a-ha moment is to exist in a state of wide-awakeness.



Greene emphasizes the connection between “wide-awakeness, cognitive clarity, and existential concern,” (1978, p.9), stressing a preoccupation for “that terrible distancing and indifference,” (1978, p.9) that prevents us from asking questions about the human condition and achieving an awareness of the space that self occupies in community. She says, “If you're submerged in the crowd and have no opportunity to think for yourself, to look through your own eyes, life is dull and flat and boring. The only way to really awaken to life, awaken to the possibilities, is to be self-aware,” to look between the facts, figures and the taken-for-granted. Wide-awakeness becomes an achievement because it is an ability to pose the right questions so that one day, ‘why’ and ‘why not’ become the questions instead of accepting the taken-for-granted.

The concerns of Maxine Greene around wide-awakeness and unfinishedness often intertwine and parallel my own as I work through and create an apt interpretation of moral imagination as a tool to guide thought and retention. Her use of the dialectic through which to investigate events and situations utilizing moral imagination to uncover and connect meanings toward a broader purpose of becoming resonate loudly in my own everyday existence. She says, “Images and figures speak directly to our indignation, to some dimension of ourselves where we connect with others. They open our eyes, they stir our flesh, they may even move us to try to repair our world,” (1995, p.143). Greene’s dialectical approach allow both a personal analytical investigation of

events and situations that present an opportunity for discovering the possibilities in becoming outraged over injustices. Greene's existential concern remains the soul of her writing: how to be the most fully human by remaining in a state of constant questioning and wideawakeness and through this action to make a more just and compassionate world.

The tool of moral imagination helps people to do this by exposing both the “darks and the lights, the wounds and the scars and the healed places,” (Greene, 1995, p.28), all elements that must be in place to achieve what Greene calls wide-awakeness. Living in a state of wide-awakeness means to pick up on details that might otherwise be overlooked, not considered, or not counted. Not only visual details of images in art, but the details of being and becoming in the everyday—of what we say with words and actions, of hearing and listening to the cues around us, and of always questioning. She says, “Consciousness doesn't come automatically; it comes through being alive, awake, curious, and often furious,” (Greene, 2008, edutopia article). For Greene, imagination “creates openings to the unpredictable,” (1995, p.145) and it's through these openings that ideas, habits, thoughts and thoughtlessness become exposed and explored in the search for how to live the most fully human life. She writes, “I am caught in questions again about meaning and reference, and I find the questions almost as important as the moments of disclosure,” (1995, p.145).

Greene's search for how to live the most fully human life cannot be explored separately from her fury around issues of social justice and her intent on protecting the human condition. At the crux of her being, Greene emphatically proclaims the right of each individual to live without oppression, and without restraint to become and to change. Greene reflects on Dewey, himself in a constant struggle against "habit, routine, and deadening fixity," (1995, p.64) all forms of "social pathology which works powerfully against effective inquiry into social institutions and conditions," (Dewey, 1927, 1954, p.170). Greene's foray into imagination as an ally illustrates a concern for how we live most completely in community through choices seeing, like Dewey, that community is both a place and an action.

### **I Am What I Am Not Yet: Possibility through Communication**

Exploring concepts of community and education through literature, television, or film necessitates manipulation of conscious thought by accessing the tool of moral imagination to reach beyond things that are familiar. Greene explains, "Of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions," (1995, p. 3).

Imagination used as a tool enables us to assemble a coherent world, to open up a possibility of empathy, and to ask a whole new world of questions, (Langer, 1957). Yet manipulating and making sense of lived experience without the tool

of moral imagination might also unmask a darker side of possibility which does not value the lives of all, nurture the human condition, or work to end oppression. For Greene, these are the poisonous roots that the tool of moral imagination uncovers, dislodges, and examines. Always in a state of becoming, Greene constantly seeks a path away from human oppression using moral imagination as a navigating tool to weed through states of possibility.

Greene writes, “I keep pondering the meanings of inclusion and wondering how it can occur without the kind of normalization that wipes out differences, forcing them to be repressed, to become matters of shame rather than pride,” (1993, p. 212). For this reason, she urges a constant dialogue and an ongoing openness to a state of possibility. Through the dialectic, she finds the elements of becoming and of the not yet. She discusses the idea that through crossing borders of our own comfort zones, we might begin to identify ourselves—by remaining open to the idea of discovery we remain in a constant state of possibility.

To remain in a wide-awake frame of mind, Greene urges exploration of new communities whose reflections might further reveal a person yet to be. To remain open to possibility requires courage to experience situations through varying lenses, even remaining open to the possibility of things unraveling or even unknown. Remaining open to this possibility we courageously situate ourselves within a state of becoming, continually emerging into what we are not

yet. By exploring connections that support human dignity, moral imagination becomes the safety net we carry along to cautiously journey treacherous borders and to doggedly explore spaces that heretofore remained hidden.

Throughout her career, Greene has practiced crossing to new territories and remaining open to possibilities. Her habit of crossing boundaries might be applied to borders of all sorts—physical, emotional, economic, systemic, political, aesthetic—to opening mind and body to new learning experiences, especially with the realization that learning is the journey and not the goal of becoming. The “stuff” of real learning happens not in goals achieved but in the experience of taking the journey, of exploring unexamined spaces and of reexamining ideas. Greene acknowledges that many do not feel comfortable asking questions that lead the journey of learning. She says, “This is partly because persons marked as unworthy are unlikely to feel good enough to pose the questions in which learning begins,” (1993, p. 212) if they don’t feel safe. She continually revisits a concept of becoming and of being unfinished throughout her thinking; it is this concept of unfinishedness that speaks for moral imagination.

Even in her nineties, Greene continues to host a salon using literature to travel with eager participants on a journey, to use the situations, lands and characters to discuss real-world issues and explore possibilities. Critically educating through the dialectic in this way requires deliberate movement toward

resituating self, to offer the possibility for “new subjects, positions, identities, and social relations that can produce resistance to and relief from the structures of domination and oppression,” (Giroux, 1992, p.3). Greene travels intellectually to new places through art and literature, and uses these journeys to open up possibilities to ask new questions, exploring the notion that “human life [is] an adventure in understanding,” (Langer, p. 281).

Surrounded by an unyielding quest to be the best, people perhaps often race by those things that should provide reason to pause. Questions that reveal where our food comes from or who makes trendy clothing sold in stores might reveal conditions that do not sit well with a sense of right and wrong and it becomes easier not to ask the question of why. Greene says one reason for this

...is our tendency to perceive our everyday reality as a given - objectively defined, impervious to change. Taking it for granted, we do not realize that the reality, like all others, is an interpreted one. It presents itself to us as it does because we have learned to understand it in standard ways....There are no guarantees, but wide-awakeness can play a part in the process of liberating and arousing, in helping people pose questions with regard to what is oppressive mindless, and wrong, (Greene, 1978, p.9).

Wide-awakeness is a prerequisite for people to be able to ask the right questions, to suddenly access ‘the why,’ and to make conscious efforts to elevate the human condition. To educate for wide-awakeness “involves equipping people with the ability to identify alternatives, and to see possibilities in the situations they confront,” (p.8) because for so many people, the feelings of

domination and powerlessness are pervasive and disabling. She says, “Only as [people] learn to make sense of what is happening, can they feel themselves to be autonomous. Only then can they develop the sense of agency required for living a moral life,” (Pinar, 2005, p.66). Greene supposes that a conscious endeavor on the part of individuals to stay ‘awake,’ and to think about their own condition as part of a world, propels questions of why and why not into realms of possibilities. Her concepts of wide-awakeness and unfinishedness and of remaining open to possibilities are foundational elements in my definition of moral imagination, because each is integral to questioning and valuing the state of human life, and neither is adequately encountered without this tool.

### **Thoughtlessness**

Greene’s voice echoes a perspective voiced by Hannah Arendt, of using the educational space to prepare ourselves to act with full knowledge in a public space—in schools as teachers, in boardrooms as leaders, and in places of community gatherings as participants. The cynicism and the “erosion of the role of the public intellectual” (Purpel, 1999 p.21) have impoverished the Arendtian concept of public space as a place for dialogue and well-informed debate (1999).

For the purposes of this dissertation Arendt’s notion of the banality of evil must be introduced. Approaching with precise consideration the dark side of imagination during her coverage of the Eichmann trials in the mid-twentieth

century, she considered that a new form of criminal mind became prevalent in that time. It is absolutely necessary to acknowledge and speak out against the “unnecessary human suffering and to deepen public and professional awareness of its depth,” (Purpel, 1999, p.4). It was Arendt’s observation that the twentieth century heralded the emergence of bureaucrats blind to consequence, unconcerned for and alienated by the world so much that they “eagerly laid waste with little regard for the human condition,” (Young-Breuhl, 2006, p.5). Greene’s notion of wide-awakeness embraces and acknowledges some act continually in a state of thoughtlessness, and it is this acknowledgement of thoughtlessness that adds fury to her quest in becoming. To be wide-awake to areas of light as well as darkness and becoming furious at the failures of social justice that defines the human race is the first step necessary to change direction and move toward a space that sustains human dignity for all.

### **David Purpel**

I must necessarily begin with a confession that I take the tragic view of life, that is, I see our lives as fated to involve heroic and virtuous struggles that ultimately end in failure. I resonate with the Sisyphean experience of meaning and dignity deriving from continuous and neverending engagement in the task of creating a better world in the face of an awareness of its futility, (Purpel, 1999, p.137).

As educators, we are required to respond to the challenges of life and to choose among the many moral, political, and cultural possibilities open to us, (Purpel, 2007, p.95).



Purpel's quest for ultimate meaning tries to get at something deep within the human condition, to tap a unique passion for social justice in each and every individual. He writes, "Among the most self-deceptive assumptions of the world view...is that there is a single rational agent that constitutes each human consciousness," (Purpel, 2007, p.97). Following in the footsteps of the prophets, Purpel's quest for social justice becomes a spiritual one grounded in everyday dehumanizing experience. His focus helps to reveal that the values of present-day social structures do little to counteract the possibility of destruction to souls present in a culture where not only do "all the pieces [*no*] matter," (Simon, 2011) neither do all the people. Through casual discussions I've learned that Purpel impressed upon at least two of his close friends that *The Wire* was worth watching (S. Shapiro, and L. Pitts, personal communication, 2013) and there is no wonder why; an outraged cry for social justice resonates throughout the series. The show provokes difficult questions and provokes thoughtfulness.

Throughout history and across cultures, one might easily argue that some lives are consistently valued more than others. "If the human being is demeaned, if her or his family is delegitimized, crucial rights are being trampled on," (Greene, 1993, p.212). Purpel's angst and concerns are fueled by a desire to repair a world where some lives are valued more than others and to act in acknowledgment that all human lives matter. Both teachers and students should begin to acknowledge the culture in which they journey as an educative space—

to place a name upon the ills that affect experience by learning about the social, cultural, historical and economic experiences of many with the aim of mustering the courage to ask new, difficult, and serious questions. Purpel writes, “Not only do we need to nourish critical consciousness ... We need to teach people what critical thinking is, and about the ways in which to critique research, scientific findings, policy statements, and artistic creations,” (1989, pp.132-133). Asking difficult questions promotes new knowledge and begins to educate the whole person to act on multiple levels of knowledge, becoming fully aware of the intent and consequence located in the rhetoric that shapes everyday experience of people living in community. Cultural surroundings provide a classroom for one’s educational journey. Purpel embellishes that “We must be aware of our relationship to knowledge—how we create it, how it shapes us, and what it means to us,” (1989, p.130). Like Dewey he reflects there is a changing truth for each individual based on cultural experience within a community, yet he adamantly expresses concern that the process of what people acknowledge as authoritative should be vigorously investigated. Synthesizing Greene’s wide-awakeness with Dewey’s notion of a changing truth Purpel writes, “To be uncritical is to be unaware of the human character of our culture,” (p.132). “Dewey reminds us that education is about learning to create a world and that our most vital and demanding task as educators is to be mindful of the kind of world that we want to create,” (Purpel, 2007, p.95).

Purpel, in urging us to courageously question the dominant cultural ideologies of achievement and conquest, also insists we become outraged when we locate instances where the worth of human beings is sacrificed for nihilistic, meaningless gains. He continues,

Our culture demands ever more products, thrills, innovations, titillations, scandals, sensations, caring-do, outrageousness; it is ever more mean-spirited and vengeful, increasingly paranoid, violent, and destructive, (1999, pp.138-139).

Purpel seriously inspects all aspects of cultural communications. Echoing Dewey's notion of a changing truth he states we are continuously "constructing ways in which we are to live with each other," (1999, p. 133) through everyday experiences. Purpel also echoes Greene's emphasis on wide-awakeness, "on the critical consciousness that makes us aware of our presence in the world and of the existential reality that requires us to act upon it," (1989, p.132), to always question the everyday-ness and that life might actually be lived differently. By being wide-awake and acknowledging an ever-changing truth, Purpel reminds us that a goal of education where moral imagination can be utilized involve "the twin pillars of freedom, namely, responsibility and choice," (2007, p.96).

For Purpel, leaving behind thoughtless everyday experience and applying the tool of moral imagination to lived experience permits a different way of knowing and doing; it is what he describes as the possibility in possibilities, of

venturing into alternative spaces. His conceptualization of socialization and communication as educative follows Dewey's notion of truth as constantly changing, including the realization that the concept of social involves the valuation of another's well-being because we do not exist apart from the whole of humankind. He writes that a "Critical consciousness of history...enables us to remember that there are origins and beginnings," (1989, p.126) and origins connect us to the human condition. Purpel points out that if we continue to educate and "to sidestep moral paradoxes" to talk about how best to educate "aside from talking about the moral considerations for the kind of culture we wish to create," (1989, p.8), the path for moral imagination becomes blocked, and instead a pathway opens up for careless and thoughtless presentations of an imaginative and creative mind. The tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice provides courage to gaze intently upon the world as it is, to question it relentlessly, and to travel through it nonetheless. Purpel implies that it takes the courage to employ moral imagination to encounter experience, but only in doing so will the possibility of possibilities be adequately explored and examined, to provide a "pedagogy of transformation and meaning," (Purpel, 1989, p. 188) instead of a pedagogy of hierarchy, inequality, and authority.

Purpel asks us to consider the relationship between education, transformation, and information, augmenting Dewey's definition of education as "the making of a world," (p. 134) but also a making that is a world that

continuously evolves to become a space where all human lives are valued. Purpel says simply hearing that communication is education toward the making of a world is not sufficient rather, he insists that that knowledge of communication becomes a call for action to repair the world and to value the human condition in the process. Purpel yearns for learning to be critical and to ask hard questions without easy answers. "Interpretation cannot be situated outside of ideology, that is, outside of the considerations of power, historical struggle, and human interests," (1989, p.xiv). The connections might be found in a holistic education that assembles mind, body and soul and for which a map is drawn using moral imagination as a navigating tool.

Purpel's agreement that what is communicated to the learner does indeed become the basis of education uses this foundational position to urge educators to examine their own beliefs to create social transformation. Once more, consider the relationships between education, communication and moral imagination. Might one purpose of education be to eliminate fear and loathing of the other instead of aiming for the highest scores on tests? Purpel says that instead some educators communicate a message of power, "control and standardization" in order to compete in a global marketplace, instead of "a pedagogy of transformation and meaning," (1999, p.188). In opposition to the prevalent dominant ideology of competition and global dominance, of how to win in a global marketplace, educators might begin to investigate the marketplace to

locate commonalities with the goal of alleviating fear of folks that are other. This approach engages what Purpel regards as a more critical, holistic education that values the lives of every human being and reaches for a critical collective consciousness in support of human dignity and worth of all.

Purpel and Dewey accede that the totality of all that is communicated to the learner becomes the educative experience—much of Purpel’s writing is about ‘the hidden curriculum,’ of classroom and school; and they also share a vision of education as the process “by which we can engage and make a world,” (Purpel, 1989, p. 125). Dewey’s contained expression urges us to simply acknowledge the relationship between the two, while Purpel’s prophetic stance demands an outraged critical voice with the overall purpose of benefiting the condition of humankind (1989, p. 124) and urging educators to acknowledge all aspects of relationships in communication and education. Just because we believe it to be the right thing does not always mean that others feel the same way. Purpel wants educators to communicate things that are interesting as well as socially important (p. 17) as a step in the right direction toward reparation of the world, but sadly states that the overarching problem with education is that schools struggle to teach anything well, (1989, p.122). Purpel’s spiritual passion to redeem education stems from a zeal that there is a responsibility to something greater than ourselves, and that our society is currently failing in that responsibility. His call should not go unanswered by teachers and parents, or

misconstrued by legislators as a call for stricter guidelines. Purpel wants to renegotiate all forms of education, and he uses the tool of moral imagination to transform educational space into a space of community possibilities.

### **Moral Outrage: An Arendtian Perspective**

Even at his most outraged, Purpel seemingly finds solace in the possibility of hope and repair. In that respect he pays homage to other great philosophers and theorists, Dewey and Greene among them. He writes that we have to be able to imagine what Greene calls to ‘possibilize,’ that like some prophets we can have hope rather than despair, (1999). Yet Purpel and other critical educators accept that within the possibilities of imagination hides the tendency toward suffering, oppression and fear that might result in a devaluation of human life. Purpel’s call to educators, to become more responsible for the world—to create a spiritual reverence for the earth and its inhabitants—resonates around and supports the notion of a holistic education. Purpel reminds us that there are no purely educational issues, only issues of social, political, economic, and moral concerns, urging an affirmation of “a moral credo that informs and energizes educational policies and practice and to urge other educators to do the same,” (1999, p. 4).

Purpel criticizes those who seek to avoid responsibility for actions through “a process of denial that includes blindness, self-absorption, and victim-blaming,” (p.4). He writes,

Perhaps most disturbing of all is the realization that the movers and shakers in government, business, communications, advertising, banking, et. al....the very people who have brought us to our present plight...are among the brightest, most articulate, most creative, most imaginative, and most reflective people in the land, (1999, p.188).

For Purpel, Arendt's concept of the banality of evil arrives as thoughtlessness—in direct opposition to Greene's wide-awakeness—as an action devoid of both critical and moral consciousness. The tool of a critical moral imagination is indeed absent where banality thrives. Purpel builds upon this sentiment in his call for a holistic education, where “all the pieces matter,” (Simon, 2011) and thoughts are deliberately and purposefully connected to inner and outer selves, community, cultural, political, and economic significance. “A truly holistic education is one that seeks to integrate the inner self with the outer self and thereby connect the personal with our social, cultural, moral, political, and economic contexts,” (1999, p.134). Education separated from these ingredients becomes thoughtless and robotic, it reeks of banality; moral imagination is the tool that helps bind the pieces of a holistic existence together. Without it, we seek a place of inauthentic community and hypervisual perfection “echoing the words of screenwriters and the rhythms of perfume advertisements; we mime a thousand carefully set images,”



(Purdy, 1999, p.12). We make decisions based on someone else's manufactured ideal with no regard for the implications of our action.

Arendt's discussion of the banality of evil provides a discussion point for thoughtlessness conducted in Purpel's and our own history. He clarifies saying, "As members of the human community we need to be reminded that we have created hunger, war, poverty, and oppression, and as citizens of the universe, we must renew our covenant to repair the world," (1999, p.130). Because we are citizens of this world, there is a responsibility to continually strive for compassion, "to reduce unnecessary human suffering," (1999, p.4) even to the elimination of suffering. For Purpel, Dewey and Greene, thoughtlessly decimating or devaluing individuals is violating something bigger, because it violates the "order of mankind," (Young-Breuhl, 2006, p. 289).

Using a lens of moral imagination focuses the banality of evil toward a more holistic viewpoint of education. Purpel finds hope in a holistic education through wide-awakeness with the ultimate aim of eliminating human suffering and repairing the world. He notes that this leap will not be achieved without consideration of all the pieces—"all the pieces matter" (Simon, 2011)—but by striving toward a holistic education not assessed by test scores or statistical averages, but by how we overturn oppression, relieve suffering, and end poverty. From this perspective, the tool of moral imagination might become an antidote to the thoughtless banality of bureaucracy. Purpel's concerns journey

beside Greene's wide-awakeness to the inherent possibilities in 'becoming' and in 'the not yet.' "The presence of others in a shared world makes this [wide-awakeness] both possible and necessary," (Crawford, 2009, p125).

### **Looking Forward**

Educators and learners might acknowledge the communities in which they journey by learning more about the social, cultural, historical and economic realities of diverse populations, and to muster the courage to ask new and oftentimes difficult, consequence-provoking questions. One must grasp "the interrelatedness between schooling and the larger culture," (Shapiro & Purpel, 2005, p.ii) exploring a space where experiences might be dissected and connected with experiences of others. Moral imagination is a navigating tool that allows us to separate what currently is from what might be. Moral imagination helps us to perceive for others what we apply to ourselves by allowing us to create new paths. Marcuse pointed out that a society which does not constantly recreate runs the risk of becoming obsolete (1969). His insight refers not to a participatory ability to act or react, but instead to acknowledging a deep-seated energy that defines who we are. Dewey describes this notion as "the common faith of mankind," (1934). Purpel describes it as a mysterious energy. Moral imagination—envisioning "what is humanly possible in terms of providing food, shelter, and clothing necessary to keep human subjects alive" (McLaren and Lankshear, 1994, p.47)— might indeed occupy part of our cultural

consciousness. A society that fences off its people from accessing moral imagination loses the common faith of mankind, and indeed runs the risk of becoming obsolete. “Dewey reminds us that, no matter how frustrated we are, our ultimate hope is also part of the world...No matter how much our lives are uniquely our own, we remain fundamentally interconnected with others,” (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007, p.6). Greene interjects that there is a requisite beauty in our unfinishedness if we are wide-awake enough to sense it. Purpel reminds us of the possibility of all possibilities and of our inherited responsibility to remain vigilant to protect the humanity of all.

By remaining open to possibility through the tool of moral imagination, individuals deliberately resituate a unique position toward a state of not yet, and an acceptance of the unfinishedness around them. Our reflective critical inquiry skills should “improve our individual and shared capacity to tap into the critical potential of lived experience in a world that is unalterably characterized by flux and change,” (Kadlec, p.12). To be open to possibility takes courage to acknowledge and consider the implications of all possibilities. Moral imagination becomes requisite to remaining mindful of all possibilities—that “all the pieces matter,” (Simon, 2011).

A holistic education tended by moral imagination hones the responsibility an individual has toward the whole, and a responsibility that the community has for all individuals. Using the concept of wide-awakeness, Greene and Purpel

“place emphasis on the critical consciousness that makes us aware of our presence in the world and of the existential reality that requires us to act upon it...to be free to contemplate the possibility that life might be otherwise,” (1989, p. 132). A holistic education tended by the tool of moral imagination is indeed a path toward repairing a world gone awry.

The next chapters of this dissertation introduce discussions of characters as they use moral imagination to educate communities and each other to positively affect lives caught in the tangle of *The Wire*. The chapter follows multiple connections made through experience and encounter to expose, identify, and move beyond the cultural shadows and borders that shape and mold the everyday experience of lives caught in a cruel tug-of-war that constantly renegotiates space. If one group has then someone else has not.

The game depicted in *The Wire* is constantly adapting around a unique history of the people with whom it intersects. The cast of characters that play the game become the community, though the outcome is influenced as much by the changing inhabitants as are the individuals marked by the changing rules of the game. The elemental and constantly shifting truths of the game also affect surrounding dysfunctional institutions, bureaucratic snafus, and crumbling urban structures. As key characters begin to work with the tool of moral imagination in consideration of social justice issues to weed through everyday experience, they recognize and realize that thoughtlessness might be tossed aside to more

carefully value human dignity. The next chapter analyzes text around the idea that where the dignity of everybody matters the banality of evil might become uprooted from our everyday experience by employing the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice.

### CHAPTER III

#### EVERYBODY MATTERS

All the pieces matter. – Lester Freamon, (Simon, 2011).

Whatever else people are called upon to do, they have the inevitable, agonizing, and exhilarating task of constructing ways in which we are to live with each other, (David Purpel, 1999, p. 133).

We must encourage our young people to become grounded dreamers, (Shapiro 2006, p.176).

The last question we wanted to ask was if *The Wire* got any of this stuff right and this is really what cities are facing, then why is it that nobody's paying attention? (Simon, 2008).

In chapter two, moral imagination is defined as a tool with uses evolving from specific points found in the work of three philosophers: Dewey's changing notion of truth aided by his concept of democracy and individual lived experience; Greene's notions of unfinishedness and wide-awakeness particularly with respect to banality and thoughtlessness; and Purpel's cries of moral outrage aimed at decreasing practices and instances of inequality. This chapter sifts through and groups themes found throughout *The Wire* to clear a path for discussions of moral imagination, as does chapter four. Because the series in its entirety is more than sixty episodes stretching across five seasons

this chapter sharply focuses discussion on instances of moral imagination and does not attempt to trace entire story arcs. Instead, six themes will be introduced, laying out particular situations and scenes in which each theme appears. The first three themes are presented in this chapter with the next three themes analyzed in chapter four. The analysis of the examples is engaged through characters' spoken lines, visual representation and camerawork, and at times through body language and position within the television frame, as well as the hermeneutic of both viewer and writer/director. The characters and topics presented across these six themes are examples of the myriad of lush, well-crafted stories present in Simon's televised treatise against systemic dysfunction and social injustices found in the western world, and specifically in the city of Baltimore in the first decade of the twenty-first century; the overarching themes of inclusiveness, truth, banality, questioning, seeing, choice, and responsibility can be applied beyond *The Wire's* specific location and situation on a broader perspective through proposing critical questions. Series writers were hoping viewers would recognize as their own stories belonging to the city of Baltimore. The themes speak to the larger issue of a cultural divide addressed by series creator David Simon in televised drama, journalistic and fictional writings, and through multiple public speaking opportunities. Referring to the United States as two Americas, he says,

In my country you're seeing a horror show. You're seeing a retrenchment in terms of family income, you're seeing the

abandonment of basic services, such as...functional public education. You're seeing the underclass hunted through an alleged war on dangerous drugs that is in fact merely a war on the poor and has turned us into the most incarcerative state in the history of mankind, in terms of the sheer numbers of people we've put in American prisons and the percentage of Americans we put into prisons. No other country on the face of the Earth jails people at the number and rate that we are, (2013).

The following themes are examined here through textual analysis of the spoken word and also visual imagery to encounter theories and philosophies introduced in chapter two of this dissertation to further chisel and hone a definition for the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice. Six themes present in *The Wire* that will be examined in support of moral imagination are:

1. Everybody matters
2. A changing notion of truth
3. Banality and thoughtlessness
4. Seeing beyond the taken for granted
5. Asking critical questions
6. People claiming responsibility

### **More Than a Voyeuristic Experience**

Having gained a viewing audience over the past decade that is increasingly comprised of upper middle class viewers, I acknowledge an



inclination to view the series could be interpreted as a voyeuristic experience for the adrenaline junkie hooked on violence, brutality or sexual exploit. And these elements are well-represented in many episodes of the series. But *The Wire* presents much more than a stereotypical cops and robbers experience for suburban and white-collar folk. It offers a chance to contemplate the notion of a surplus population—one that is both ignored and objectified. Simon's writing is underscored by the idea that human beings without the means to earn a sustainable living are not valued in this culture; "Mistaking capitalism for a blueprint as to how to build a society strikes me as a really dangerous idea in a bad way," (2013) he says. Over the last three decades, our society's market based economy has devolved into a market society; the commodification of civic life has altered both the product and the customers. The more we take for granted that the good life can be bought, the more income disparities matter, (Sandel, 2012). The characters and situations developed by Simon and series' writers work to detail and portray characters as whole human beings, not just gun-toting, drug-selling cop and robber fare; the multifaceted characters are open to interpretation on many theoretical levels including one informed by the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice that pokes and prods issues of inequality, conditions of dire poverty, America's test-centric system of education, and the consequences of applying capitalist notions to human lives.

The series' inclination to introduce these issues without solving them on screen for the viewer creates a space for discussion; there are not yes or no answers. Both academics and media critics point to the lack of closure demonstrated throughout the show, placing it apart from the typical cable or network crime drama.

*The Wire* accounts for a level of complexity that resonates with this view, with some events leading nowhere and other to unforeseen circumstances....There is no overarching story to *The Wire*, there is no clear message or outcome, no clear narrative to follow throughout; it is a collection...of moments and events...[it] does not explain or comprehend. In fact, it confuses and mystifies, it complicates and subverts, (Penfold-Mounce et al, 2011, p. 163).

Each episode of each season of *The Wire* adds to a redefinition of the notion of a serialized television drama because it does not conform to industry-recognized boundaries within the television medium of timely commercial breaks and neatly tied up conclusions across a specified time of exactly one hour. Rather, each episode is integral to the development of the whole series across all five seasons and also to each character; some episodes are slightly shorter or slightly longer than an hour and there are no commercial breaks. Characters may appear in each episode or enter and exit multiple times across multiple seasons. Individual episodes of *The Wire* do not contain beginnings and endings, do not present an entire story and therefore are not treated as such in this discussion. The themes presented in these chapters to illustrate instances

of moral imagination are found season-to-season, across episodes, and between multiple characters influencing the conclusion of the series as a whole.

Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson heralds the show as “truly exceptional...it has done more to enhance our understandings of the challenges of urban life and urban inequality than any other media event or scholarly publication,” (2008). Another academic journal editorialist notes, “The TV series itself has been particularly valorized as an exception to the everyday banalities of televisual culture....the ‘difficulty’ of *The Wire* demands commitment – a heroic and masochistic duty,” (Sharma, 2009, p.3).

*The Wire* has also been widely hailed for its social realism, particularly the challenge its essential pessimism about the ability of entrenched institutions to effect change presents to the conspicuously efficacious individual dynamism that is conventional in Hollywood storytelling, (Walters, 2008).

With the series defined and supported this way, *The Wire*—as a work of fiction—can be examined as a space to discuss instances of utilization of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice alongside a depiction of inner-city existence enmeshed with systems of neglect, abundant crime and unyielding poverty.

It is not the goal of this chapter to suggest that the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice can only be discussed through tough topics presented within the script of the show. Rather it is the goal of this

discussion to propose that the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice raises questions across a multitude of societal factors, presents no promises of solution, and remains a necessary component of an everyday existence that values human lives and seeks to diminish inequalities.

### **The Game Is the Game: Following the Vernacular in *The Wire***

Accessing and understanding jargon-filled street-vernacular is integral to grasping relationships and specific situations central to this discussion describing instances for the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice depicted in *The Wire*. “Viewers of *The Wire* must master a whole argot, though it can take a while, because the words are never defined, just as they wouldn’t be by real people tossing them around,” (Talbot, 2007, p.1). For example the prolific drug business is defined by individuals according to rules of “the game,”—a business arena where the life of an individual has little value when held against making a profit; the game is the space where the overarching goal becomes making money at any cost, where people become abstractions, and communities of people are irrevocably and negatively impacted. Listening closely, viewers will often catch the line, “It’s just business,” or “the game is the game,” as an explanation for an action that causes harm to another human being.

The idea of game typically refers to a play space that provides an opportunity to suspend beliefs and act in accordance with a specific set of rules.

Games sometime allow us to pretend a different set of rules exists for each group of players; The game of profiting at any cost depicted throughout *The Wire* shows the social and economic divide that became more and more prevalent in the last decades of the twentieth century and remains strong in the first decades of the twenty-first: people with means are able to afford better health care, better education, better housing, better everything. People living beneath the poverty line do not have access to these staples of everyday life and are forced to play by a different set of rules created along the lines of household income. In *The Wire* the hollowed-out space of gameplay that provides ample room for shifting rules and excuses such as “It’s just business” makes it easy to blame others for predicaments, and crowds out the opportunity to become responsible for self. As characters play by different sets of rules, the effects of inequality are reinforced; the value of human life from the first season to the last season is greatly diminished as the game becomes more competitive profoundly illustrating the effects of market-enforced cultures placing low value on human lives. Because the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice is not emphasized during the rules of this game, stones are left unturned, issues glossed over, and conditions taken for granted as the value placed on human life is discouraged and lives are easily traded in the name of profit. The phrase we hear time and again, “the game is the game,” ultimately comes to

mean certain lives do not matter and that there is an acceptable level of loss of life as collateral damage.

### **Human Collateral**

The game affects the lived experience of the individuals who exist within its borders so much so that characters have to adapt to survive throughout the television series in the same way that human experience adapts to the institutional rules and environmental dysfunction in everyday lived experience. One game depicted in *The Wire* depends on the proliferation and cunning of corner boys—teenagers who hang out on street corners and are the parts and pieces that make the drug trade run smoothly. Corner boys are rarely valued and often sacrificed just as front line troops might be used on the battlefield, or pawns might be easily yielded on the chessboard. Greene writes that we must deliberately avoid becoming detached from life to engage whole-heartedly with the world. The tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice helps to attach our own future to the fate of others.

To see things or people small, one chooses to see from a detached point of view, to watch behaviors from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday life. To see things or people big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead, (1995, p.10).

Simon notes that the changing roles of the drug-trade are influenced by the changing roles of post-911 American culture to illustrate the instability of lived experience in disenfranchised, economically depressed communities, (Hendel, 2012). Simon points toward the necessity of people to resituate and recreate selves outside of game space. These chapters trace themes where characters utilize the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice to redefine selves in relation to the larger whole by eschewing the banal interpretation of “it’s just business,” and looking at situations with renewed alertness to the sanctity of all human life. In doing so these characters begin to define a new space within which to operate, and aided by the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice, stasis and immobility are challenged and outraged individuals claim responsibility for actions that value the lives of everybody.

### **Redefining Existing Notions**

This discussion around instances of moral imagination in *The Wire* does not specifically focus on people pulling each other up from failure—good things do not magically happen in this series as heroines rush in to save impoverished children. Instead there is a focus on multiple instances of utilization of the tool of moral imagination in support of human dignity even in situations that could easily be described as utter failure; each instance contributes to and compliments the larger whole almost as a choreographed dance. In this aspect, *The Wire* is a

literary work where characters are at the right place at the right time, or more likely at the wrong place at the wrong time because they are often meet untimely deaths. Yet recognizing this construct should not detract from Simon's underlying point that even the smallest actions are linked and have repercussions. "All the pieces matter," (Simon, 2011) is the phrase quoted by patient understanding Detective Lester Freamon, played by Clarke Peters, to describe the attention to detail required to create a holistic version of events. Even the smallest act utilizing or ignoring the tool of moral imagination adds to a larger picture. Every action and every body matters to the sustainable existence of the whole.

### **Multi-layered Characterizations**

Series co-writer Ed Burns notes "the Baltimore drug culture devour[ed] the parents of many children," (Simon, 2011) and that the only people to raise the children are the children themselves. Simon says that the writers of *The Wire* were bored with the concept of good and evil character development; they were not just trying to tell a good tale, they "were very much trying to pick a fight," (Alvarez, 2009, p. 3) by creating characters with often selfish and confused ambitions and motivations, but always on a continuum—always in a state of becoming. *The Wire* breaks apart notions of urban inhabitants as homogenous victims of oppression because it depicts the varying personalities



and “multiplicity of identities within the group,” (Fuggle, 2009, p. 5) shaped by bureaucratic systems, struggling institutions, and shared community.

Such is the case for a much-heralded character from the series, Omar Little, played by Michael K. Williams. He is a Westside Robinhood who steals only from players in the game. He has a soft spot in his heart for little hoppers; though he robs for a living he also gives money to neighborhood mothers and their children. He sets up elaborate charades and hoaxes. Omar Little is a fearless, faithful, sexy, homosexual gangster who lives by his own code—he only steals from players in the game, he observes the Sunday Morning Truce of non-violence, and does not curse. When he walks through the streets and alleys of Westside Baltimore, viewers hear birdcalls of “Omar’s coming” as children scamper out of the way. Ironically, it is a young hopper who unceremoniously murders Omar Little in a convenience store as part of the game at the end of season five. His death is unceremoniously reported in a short newspaper paragraph buried inside and below the fold as another Westside killing.

*The Wire*, often described as a Greek tragedy by critics with multiple hero journeys, does not use the show’s children to mirror main plotlines but to provide valuable histories. The children represent both the circular repetitive challenge of shared histories, yet also carry with them the possibility of renewal and change. It’s worth remembering that all of the characters in *The Wire* once were

children, presumably living in similar circumstances. Viewers see this hinted at visually when the police detail working the wiretap find a photo of the then unknown drug business kingpin, Avon Barksdale, posing for a youthful portrait in full boxing gear. Two seasons later, viewers witness Barksdale's philanthropic venture when he fully funds a neighborhood boxing gym generously handing \$15,000 in cash to a former colleague; the money comes from the same drug business that destroys lives and imprisons children's families and communities, yet it also helps to establish a space for boys to learn a different sort of game.

Looking at instances where the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice involves the children of *The Wire*, provides a space to discuss the suffering and oppression of all children, the plight of communities without the resources to safely raise their children, and then to question "how to turn difficulties into possibility," (Freire, 1997, p.64). By practicing and rehearsing skills of critical introspection by analyzing *The Wire*, viewers might make the jump toward encountering a real-world, often chaotic and numbing lived experience that may be different from their own. Greene pledges that a constant collaborative examination of multiple texts helps to ponder what it means to be different in a way that doesn't completely obliterate those differences in an effort to normalize. Referring to Kant, she says, "I think of the philosopher's admonition...that all persons should be treated as ends, never as means, and what that obligation entails," (1993, p.212).

Although viewers might wish the children of *The Wire* to be treated fairly and to grow up escaping the conditions into which they were born, the space occupied by the game in this television series constantly pervades issues of safety and dignity especially for the children, leaving only a small amount of room for escape from a lived existence defined without opportunity to wield the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice. Acknowledging an existence apart from a viewer's known lived experience helps to open up a space for examination of the unknown and to question the possibilities. From this aspect, "One could argue that *The Wire* is an 'open textual machine,'" (Sharma, 2011, p.5) allowing multiple levels of interpretation from a variety of approaches. Textual analysis of *The Wire* provides a vehicle for thinking about actions, and thinking critically about notions of community and lived experience from a variety of perspectives.

### **A Re-envisioned Television Medium**

Simon also challenges the notion of television production and using *The Wire* not just to entertain or distract an audience, but to delve into the tangle of moral imagination in the everyday, remodeling characters episode to episode, season to season, until a more critically composed holistic person emerges. Purpel refers to the vitality of human energies that emerge upon the unification of mind, intellect, body, and soul (1999, p.130), urging educators to consistently reflect upon the whole person. Characters in *The Wire* access and use moral

imagination to create community and chisel out identity through the realization of and yearning for selves through their individual roles in the whole, and through their unique acknowledgements of lifting oppression and valuing dignified human life across racial and economic spectra. Creating a new definition of urban-ness by employing the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice, Simon's characters vanquish notions of a homogenous urban inhabitant, and create the space for viewers to discuss more than the crime and neglect typically found in a weekly procedural police drama. Instead viewers might talk about the role of teaching, the impact of job loss on a community, and the value of asking better questions. It is the characters who reveal where the real story resides, within their individual responses, thoughts and actions in response to the whole; the story of *The Wire* beaks apart pre-conceived notions of inner-city, police crime-drama by allowing the characters to tap the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice to guide their actions, to access community, and to recognize and reshape self. Use of the tool of moral imagination to develop character in *The Wire* sets it apart from other serialized television crime drama.

### **Emerging Themes Supporting Moral Imagination**

The following sections introduce and examine specific instances of theoretical and philosophical components in a definition of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice found throughout the text of *The Wire*.

This section opens with the acknowledgement of the theme that “all the pieces matter,” (Simon, 2011) setting the stage for a discussion where each and every person matters. The “pieces” noted in Simon’s oft-quoted line do not refer to cogs in a machine, or pieces of a static puzzle, but to real human beings whose existence is accounted for and contributes to a larger whole. Everybody matters is the theme to which viewers are exposed throughout the series.

The second theme illustrating the tool of moral imagination in consideration of justice and inequality surrounds Dewey’s notion of truth, which compels us to acknowledge that there are multiple lived existences for every person even in the same families and most definitely across populations. Notions of a changing truth are used to legitimate and justify shifts in power and control and also to provide a positive spin showing that people exhibit multiple sensitivities in different situations. Although it is not the goal of this dissertation, the idea that truth changes from individual to individual within the same community also provides the foundation for a discussion of Dewey’s notion of democracy, of which a unified concept is disappearing notes series creator Simon. Sandel addresses the challenge to democracy reaped by a system of adversity characterized by vast disparities in political access and disposable income.

We live and work and shop and play in different places. Our children go to different schools. This isn’t good for democracy, nor is it a satisfying way to live, even for those of us who can afford to buy our way to the head of the line. Here’s why: democracy does

not require perfect equality. But what it does require is that citizens share in a common life, (2013).

Chapter three concludes with a discussion of the theme of banality and thoughtlessness where actions become mechanical, unquestioned and without meaning, and obstructive toward any notion of commonalities. The theme of banality astoundingly accounts for many of the destructive actions yielded by people upon other people in the name of profit.

Chapter four continues the discussion of banality and thoughtlessness from the opposing viewpoint through the concept of seeing beyond the taken-for-granted—Greene’s concept of wideawake-ness. Together, the philosophical directives of a changing notion of truth, admonishing banality and thoughtlessness, and not taking things for granted but living in a state of wideawake-ness provide a foundation for the fifth theme of embracing a habit of asking critical questions alongside the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice. *The Wire* opens a space to encounter situations with fresh eyes, and to employ the tool of moral imagination to ponder questions where the positive value of every human being might be held fast. Finally, theme six focuses analysis toward uses for the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice through the fictional applications of characters claiming responsibility for others. This discussion of individual choice is seen through the

lens of individual responsibility in community and recognizing place in community as a result of practicing a wide-awake, thoughtful lived experience.

### **Theme One: Everybody Matters**

In this section I will draw on Purpel's affirmation of "the dignity of each person and the preciousness of life;" (1999, p.5) and the importance of realizing shared connectedness through living in community found in the writings of both Greene and Dewey to talk about the theme that everybody matters.

Expressed and contemplated throughout the series, the theme of 'all the pieces matter' is presented in dialogue between characters, through visuals connecting one person to another, and in composition of storyline—stories are connected across the entire series, episodes do not offer beginnings or endings. In the episode that provides the drive and impetus for the remainder of the entire series, itself entitled "The wire," Detective Lester Freamon, played by Clark Peters, prophetically says "all the pieces matter," as he manipulates a bulletin board of photos, phone numbers and names. Detective Freamon has perfected the craft of building high-end doll house furniture, waiting out a chance for retirement after bucking the system one too many times. He is the patient sage in the storyline; manipulating pieces and parts to fit snugly together makes him tick. When he tells his young colleague that all the pieces matter, he is not just talking about the pieces in a four-inch high Queen Anne chest of drawers but

rather eluding to a business model where every person has a part to play in order for the whole to take shape.

Simon uses the character of Lester Freamon to show details that render people to be viewed as surplus or collateral actually matter to the big picture. There are many ways society says people do not matter. Simon and series writers underscore time and again that everyone matters. Paying attention to the smallest detail is required in all instances, not just for detective inquiry but for the work of building a fair society that values human dignity regardless of economic circumstance or race. Everybody matters. The notion that some do not has to change in our increasingly economically divided and dysfunctional society where a few people have everything and some people have nothing. Simon says, "We've descended into what can only be described as greed...an inability to see that we're all connected, that the idea of two Americas is implausible, or two Australias, or two Spains or two Frances," (2013). Purpel also vehemently acknowledges we are, "a society much more bent on making a lot of bucks rather than easing the needless pain and suffering of our fellow human beings, a culture obsessed with self-gratification and personal advancement," (Shapiro, 2006, p. xi). This theme of "all the pieces matter," is integral both to the conceptualization of the series and to a definition of moral imagination because it touches upon components of multiple characteristics to aid in the struggle to uphold human dignity: a changing notion of truth, banality



and thoughtlessness, wideawake-ness, seeing beyond the taken-for-granted, asking critical questions, and claiming responsibility. In these examples, recognizing that everybody matters forms the basis of guiding someone through observations and paying attention, through a critical thinking process of approaching situations and opportunities from more than one perspective, and through recognizing that there are multiple possibilities and opportunities to solve a problem. In these examples instances recognizing the importance of every person are pulled from specific episodes involving discussions of discovery and recognition through trial and error, and with guidance from another character, usually someone who steps in to teach and point out that the pieces work together toward a common end.

In the following examples, the concept that everybody matters is traced through the character of Preston “Bodie” Broadus, played by J.D. Williams, who enters the script as a corner boy, rises through the ranks of drug-dealing entrepreneurs by complying to the rules of the game with gusto; he truly wants to be the best soldier out there—doing as he is told as a matter of pride and sacrifice. Bodie in this first season perfectly defines a banal existence in his unerring obedience to authority regardless of impact on human lives. By the end of season four Bodie recognizes the absurdity of his situation where neither his life nor the lives of others are valued; in that recognition he chooses the path that values life, losing his own in the process. Bodie’s character changes from

eager and excited to confused and searching as he becomes more and more cognizant of his role in the taking of lives. Responding to the character development of young hoppers that was based from teenagers he encountered on the streets as a reporter, Simon offered, “they were sort of one foot on the corners and one foot on the playground,” (Slotnik, 2012, p.1). Season to season, *The Wire* shows the character of Bodie to be sculpted in that same manner as part playful child and part cold-blooded businessman.

### **First Example—The Wiretap Setup**

The following text specifically lays out the premise for the entire series—all the pieces matter, but also aptly describes prodding critical questions as components of a definition of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice. The pieces mentioned are not manipulable machinery components or pre-cut puzzle pieces that fit together, but human lives that touch each other and whose shared existence unquestioningly affects an understanding of the whole picture. Once this hypothesis is comprehended and agreed upon, connections are pieced together that might earlier have been overlooked the same way that society sometimes designates whole communities of people that do not matter. Recognizing the right of others to thrive in shared community is uncovered by the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice. Nurturing “that which connects us across cultural borders...drives the extraordinary and ever-expanding movement for granting

human rights throughout the world,” (Shapiro, 2006, p. 178). Recognition happens by utilizing the tool of moral imagination. Greene’s position on a shared connectedness augments the importance of this concept that all voices matter.

The world in which the person creates and works through a future project cannot but be a social world: and the nature of the project cannot but be affected by shared meanings and interpretations of existing social realities, (1988, p.70).

Everybody matters—“all the pieces matter,” (Simon, 2011)—prodding this theme of connection between human beings is foundational to a well-honed definition of moral imagination.

In the following script excerpt, after craftily escaping a juvenile detention facility and following a prolonged stay outside of the city, Preston “Bodie” Broadus comes back to the low-rise public housing neighborhood where he and other hoppers continue to run the drug business for the Barksdale family. Upon finding an inside quad called “the pit” empty, he innocently walks to the pay phone at the edge of a quad bordered by brick housing and places a call, unknowingly triggering a chain of events that will identify and connect the pieces for the patient Detective Lester Freamon. As a rooftop look-out perched high above the pit, the youngish, beefy, close-cropped, plainclothes policeman nicknamed Herc, played by Dominic Lombardozzi, watches intently through binoculars. He reacts swiftly upon seeing Bodie pick up the phone, and immediately places a call to the police outpost specifically set up to monitor the

payphone. On the other end of the line, viewers see another young man, Roland Prysbylewski—Prez for short, played by Jim True-Frost, answer the call on a headset surrounded by computers, photos, and hastily written names on small scraps of paper. Roland Prysbylewski is awkward as a uniformed police officer and unable to safely handle a firearm, yet expertly adapts to the innocuous wiretap monitoring working hard to solve the puzzle of codes and numbers that cross his screen. Detective Lester Freamon observes and listens intently nearby.

**“The Wire,” Season 1, Episode 6, 21:11 (Simon, 2011).**

THE LOW-RISE QUAD—BODIE WALKS AROUND, SEES NO ONE, GOES TO PAY PHONE. THE MUSIC OF AN ICE CREAM TRUCK IS HEARD IN THE BACKGROUND. HERC IS ON A ROOFTOP WITH BINOCULARS. AS BODIE PLACES A CALL ON THE TERRACE PAYPHONE, HERC CALLS ON HIS CELL PHONE.

INT — POLICE HEADQUARTERS. PHONE RINGS.

PREZ

Yeh

HERC

One of ours on the line.

PREZ

Got him.

HERC

Is Carv still there?

PREZ

Carv, call for you!

CARV

Yeah, hello?

HERC  
You ain't gonna believe who I'm looking at right now

CARV  
Again he walks off?

HERC  
Ding, round three.

HEAR PHONE LINE CONNECTING IN BACKGROUND, LIKE OLD DIAL-UP  
NOISE FROM INTERNET ACCESS. VIEWERS SEE A STRING OF NUMBERS  
COME ACROSS THE SCREEN

CAMERA: FRANKLIN TERRACE QUAD PAY PHONE  
PHONE RINGS. BODIE RUNS TO ANSWER IT.

BODIE  
Yo

VOICE  
What up man?

BODIE  
Yo, Stink, what up?

STINK  
Where are your manners, fool?

BODIE  
Oh, my bad, yeah.

STINK  
You need to keep your fucking head boy

BODIE  
Forgot.

CAMERA SHOWS DETECTIVE LESTER FREAMON SHIFTING THROUGH  
INDEX CARS WITH NAMES WRITTEN ON THEM. WE SEE HIM PICK UP  
ONE WITH "STINKUM" ANTON ARTIS SPELLED OUT.

BODIE  
Um, yo, What's up? Where you at?

STINK  
I don't know. Where you at?

CAMERA SHOWS LESTER FREAMON PUTTING A PHOTO WITH  
THE INDEX CARD, AND WRITING A PHONE NUMBER ON IT.

BODIE  
I'm down in the Pit. I just came home...  
I don't see nobody around, I just wanted to know what  
was up.

In these spoken lines, Bodie recognizes himself as a part of something larger. "I just came home...I don't see nobody around." Dewey's notion that the self is created through social interaction is well placed in this character; Bodie finds a greater meaning by being part of a larger community, (Garrison, 2010). He comes "home" to the pit, where he hangs out. Viewers never see his home, though presumably he does live in the neighborhood. He is referring to the pit as "home." He also says that he doesn't see anyone there and he immediately reaches out to connect, forgetting about the game rule of not identifying names on a phone or in a car. The dealers in the drug business know there is always a good chance their phones are being monitored. They provide as little information as possible during phone calls. Roland Prysbylewski, listening in on this conversation, has already broken a code dealers are using to transpose the numbers they enter into a pager system to circumvent and provide an additional layer of confusion for anyone listening in. So, when Bodie forgets and mentions a name, it is a big deal because Prysbylewski and Detective Lester Freamon

already have the cell number of the caller. Bodie knows better, but trips up when he comes home and finds nobody around.

In *The Wire*, the deliberate construction of the corner-boy operation arises due to the same concern for all the components of the law. For example, it is not an offense to take money from someone that hands you money, and the act of handing money to someone else further breaks down the process into multiple parts. We do those things every day. It is illegal to be in possession of narcotics, and therefore the corner operation reserves this task for the smallest, youngest children to actually retrieve the product from a hidden spot nearby and to run the product over to a customer. There are typically other corner boys looking out for anything suspicious in the hand-off or in the surroundings. Those youngest children never touch the money just the narcotic. The dealers know that a charge of drug possession will likely not stick to an eight year-old boy. Even in the construction of the corner boy operations, all the pieces matter.

STINK

Ain't nothing going late man.  
Uh, just catch us tomorrow, man.

BODIE

A'ight?

STINK

A'ight, yeah.

BODIE

A'ight. Later.

PREZBO SMILES, PLEASE TO HAVE HEARD HIS FIRST WIRETAP. THE CAMERA SHOWS A COMPUTER SCREEN LABELED “PIT PHONE 2”. PREZBO CHECKS THE “NON-PERTINENT” BOX.

Detective Lester Freamon is a patient teacher, shown visually from his very first screen introduction as he sits and painstakingly carves doll-house furniture while he is waiting for the phone to ring. He watches his young protégé. Detective Freamon superbly nurtures Officer Prysbylewski’s strengths in puzzle-solving, but moves in swiftly to correct when there’s a lesson to be learned. Officer Prysbylewski incorrectly identifies the call as not important to the case because he has not heard evidence of an actual drug transaction. Detective Freamon lays out the foundational theme for the series in this excerpt with four words: all the pieces matter—slowly drawling out the word all. By saying this, he instructs Officer Prysbylewski and the viewers not to take anything for granted while they’re listening in.

FREAMON

How do you log that non-pertinent?

PREZBO

[SHRUGS SHOULDERS] No drug talk.

FREAMON

They use codes that hide their pager and phone numbers. And when someone does use a phone, they don’t use names. And if someone does use a name, he’s reminded not to. All of that is valuable evidence.

PREZ

Of what?



FREAMON  
Conspiracy.

PREZ  
Conspiracy?

FREAMON  
We're building something here, detective. We're building it from scratch.  
All the pieces matter.

[HOLDS UP PHOTO, MATCHES IT WITH SOMETHING HE HAS  
WRITTEN ON AN INDEX CARD:  
"STINKUM" ANTON ARTIS 410-222-1425 PAGER]

[END SCENE.]

### **Second Example—The Game**

In this example, I continue a discussion of the idea that everybody is important and that each has a role to play. Greene notes, "We must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead," (1995, p.10). In the following chess game explanation, characters pay attention to the particular moves of each chess piece and how they work together. The crew boss is D'Angelo Barksdale, played by Lawrence Gilliard Jr. He is perhaps five years older than Bodie and the nephew of head drug czar Avon Barksdale. He is Abercrombie-and-Fitch sleek—chiseled features, shaved head, dressed in leather coats and designer jeans. He is wide-eyed and eager to prove himself, cares for the people around him yet is easily distracted by the glam and glitter he often encounters, particularly at his Uncle's headquarters in the back office of a strip club. As crew

chief, he maintains drug sales within a specific area—either a street corner, the pit, an apartment complex, or other geographic area almost like a franchised outlet for the business. The profits from the business still go up the ladder, but the crew chief is the go-to boss for the area; his employees work for him. He pays them a salary; the young hoppers do not keep the money they make on the corner.

In opening scenes of episode one viewers meet D'Angelo Barksdale as the murder defendant in a packed courtroom. This courtroom scene is covered from the perspective of the presiding judge in later in chapter four, theme five—asking critical questions. As episode three unwinds, viewers glimpse a different side of the younger Barksdale, of the responsibility he feels toward community and his inner determination to find balance as he becomes more and more aware of responsibilities to preserve human lives. By the end of season two D'Angelo is participating in a prison book club discussing Fitzgerald's oft-quoted sentence "There are no second acts in American lives," (2005, p.114) to explain his own struggle.

He's saying the past is always with us...Where we come from, what we go through, how we go through it—all that shit matters...Gatsby, he was who he was, and he did what he did, and 'cause he wasn't ready to get real with the story, that shit caught up to him, (Simon, 2011).

In season one, episode three, viewers begin to see D'Angelo Barksdale utilizing the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice; the development of his character over eighteen episodes eventually illustrates each of the themes discussed in this dissertation: everybody matters, a changing notion of truth, the snare of banality and thoughtlessness, seeing beyond the taken for granted, asking critical questions, and claiming responsibility. D'Angelo Barksdale is "a character often singled out for critical praise," (Marshall, 2012), perhaps because of this journey guided by the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice. This next example aptly encompasses a notion that everybody has a role to play, not just as cogs in a machine, but as thinking, living beings.

Bodie's slightly younger friend Wallace, played by Michael B. Jordan, is also a corner boy. He lives in an abandoned row house near the pit, and mothers to the best of his ability at least eight young school-aged boys who live in the abandoned house with him. Writers hint that Wallace is book smart, and D'Angelo notices this as well, urging Wallace to go back to Tilman Middle School instead of working on the corner. Bodie and Wallace are sitting facing each other playing a board game in the pit when D'Angelo saunters over to watch. When he notices that the two are playing checkers with chess pieces, he intervenes. The discussion that ensues is beautifully scripted as instruction for the game of chess and also for the business of drug dealing. D'Angelo describes the role of each chess piece in a language his mentees comprehend,

connecting the lesson to their lived experience. Bodie eventually identifies with the pawns yearning to be something more. This scene is important to a discussion of the tool of moral imagination because it recognizes that each role matters to a thriving community. It also ushers in a definition of pawn as expendable—a concept to which Bodie expresses outrage in later episodes as he begins to employ the tool of moral imagination to his own experience. This scene also clearly states the rules of the game at the beginning of season one, to which are later referred throughout the entire series as the power struggle influences a changing notion of truth and impacts lived experience.

**“The Buys,” Season 1, Episode 3, 10:42 (Simon, 2011)**

INT. PUBLIC HOUSING QUAD  
CAMERA QUICKLY SCANS THE EMPTY PUBLIC HOUSING QUAD, COLD MORNING, BODIE AND WALLACE ARE PERCHED IN THE SUN ON A CHAIR AND A MILK CRATE, WITH A CHESS BOARD SET UP BETWEEN THEM. D’ANGELO WALKS ACROSS THE QUAD DO THE TWO. DIAGETIC NEIGHBORHOOD MUSIC IN THE BACKGROUND.

D’ANGELO  
Yo. What’s up with the shop?

WALLACE  
No re-up

D’ANGELO  
Why not?

BODIE  
Cause we out of red caps

[HANDS A BAG OF MONEY TO D’ANGELO.]

In this scene, D'Angelo as crew chief inquires why his staff is idle, why they are not running the shop. Wallace informs him that no new product has been dropped off; Bodie adds that the reason is because there are no caps to put on the vials of heroin. Even in the big business of selling drugs, production snafus impact daily profits. In the next few lines, the trio discusses how their product is impacting the customers.

BODIE

Stink say we gonna have a new package tomorrow

D'ANGELO

New package?

BODIE

Yeah.

BODIE

Yeah, man, this weak-ass stepped-on shit we  
got out here...get these fiends agitated

WALLACE

Look at them, they still buying it though.

BODIE

Yes, they're buying twice as much and  
only getting half as high.

WALLACE MOVES A CHESS PIECE ON THE BOARD, ALMOST AS A  
PUNCTUATION TO THE CONVERSATION. D'ANGELO IS STANDING OVER  
THE CHESS BOARD, FORMING A CLASSIC RENAISSANCE PAINTING  
FIGURAL ORGANIZATION.

D'ANGELO

Yo what was that? Castle can't move like that...

This crucial questioning of a simple move on the chessboard opens up a dialogue to discuss the rules of both the game of chess and the game of big business. The camera shows D'Angelo as teacher moving into the top of a triangle of figures, his two staff members each flanking one side. "What was that?" is the introduction between these three into a discussion of how the chess pieces should operate and how the game is played, yet also illustrates a wideawake-ness to situation and intent on D'Angelo's part that is requisite for apt utilization of moral imagination. D'Angelo at this moment moves into the role of tragic figure accentuated by his constant questioning of 'What was that move supposed to be? Whose rule is that? Recognize that your actions have consequences!' that is ultimately his undoing in season two when he is discovered hanged from a doorknob inside a prison common room.

BODIE  
Na we ain't playing that.

WALLACE  
Look at the board, we playing checkers.

D'ANGELO  
[LAUGHING] Checkers?

WALLACE  
Yeah, checkers  
Yo why y'all playing checkers with a chess set?

BODIE  
Yo why you give a shit? Man, we ain't got no checkers.

D'ANGELO  
Yeah, but chess is a better game.

BODIE  
So?

D'ANGELO  
Hold up hold up, y'all don't know how to play chess do you?

BODIE  
So?

D'ANGELO  
[PULLS UP A MILK CRATE AND JOINS THE GAME]  
So? So nothing man, I'll teach y'all if y'all want to learn

BODIE  
Na man, nah. Come on, we're right in the middle of a game.

WALLACE  
Chill out, I want to see this.

Wallace is book smart. At one point, D'Angelo convinces him to leave the corner drug trade and to go back to the local middle school. Viewers later learn that Wallace also practices his own version of all the pieces matter—he is self-appointed caretaker of eight boys all without homes, and all living off the grid in a boarded-up row-house in the public housing neighborhood without electricity or running water. The reason Wallace is not in school is because he is caring for youngsters to whom he is not related, making sure they are fed, have a place to sleep and attend school. Education is still viewed as a ticket out of the neighborhood. Wallace is the breadwinner and provider. D'Angelo takes responsibility for teaching Wallace to think just as Wallace owns the responsibility of caring for his brood of homeless boys.

D'ANGELO

Y'all can't be playing no checkers on no chessboard yo.

BODIE

A'ight, A'ight man.

D'ANGELO

Now look, check it, it's simple. It's simple. See this? [PICKS UP KING KISSES IT] this the king pin. A'ight? Now, he the man. You get the other dude's king, you got the game. And he trying to get your king too, so you gotta protect it. Now the king he move one space, any direction he chose cause he's the king. Like this...this a'ight? but he ain't got no hustle. But the rest of these motherfuckers on the team, they got his back, and they run so deep he really ain't gotta do shit.

BODIE

Like your uncle

D'ANGELO

Like my uncle. Now you see this, this the queen. She's smart, she's fierce. She moves any way she want as far as she wants. And she is the go-get-shit-done piece.

WALLACE

Remind me of Stringer.

D'ANGELO

And this over here is the castle. It's like the stash. It moves like this, and like this [DEMONSTRATES VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL MOVES ON THE BOARD]

The stash refers to the hidden drug product in the drug corner operation stashed behind a stoop and never in full view. Wallace quickly questions the analogy trying to make sense of what he's hearing. The ever-cynical Bodie points to the pawns calling them "bitches." The etymology of the word pawn



actually refers to a foot soldier, making D'Angelo's chess analogy to the drug trade even more poignant as members of the drug crew are often referred to as "soldiers." He goes on, "They get capped quick," meaning they die—their lives are not worth that much in the big picture. The pawns are the first to go in the game of chess and the first to go in the business of selling drugs.

WALLACE

Dog, stash don't move, man.

D'ANGELO

Come on, yo, think. How many times we move the stash house this week? A'ight? And every time we move the stash, we got to move a little muscle with it right? To protect it, right?

BODIE

True, true you're right. All right. What about them little bald-headed bitches here?

D'ANGELO

These right here? These are the pawns. They like the soldiers. The move like this, one space forward only, except when they fight. And it's like this or like this. They like the front lines. They be out in the field.

WALLACE

So how they get to be the king

D'ANGELO

It ain't like that. See, the king stay the king. A'ight? Everything stay who he is. Except for the pawns. Now if a pawn made it all the way down to the other dude's side, he get to be queen. And like I said, the queen ain't no bitch. She got all the moves.

BODIE

A'ight. So. If I make it to the other end, I win.

D'ANGELO

If you *catch* the other dude's king, and trap it, then you win.

BODIE

But if I make it to the end, I'm top dog.

D'ANGELO

Na, yo, it ain't like that. Look, the pawns, man, in the game, they get capped quick. They be out the game early.

BODIE

[LEANS BACK, ALMOST SMILING.]

Unless they some smart-ass pawns.

[END SCENE]

Bodie ignores the rules of both games the three have been discussing—the game of chess and the drug business reference as the game, actually giving himself some credit for having intellect when he refers to, “smart-ass pawns.” He’s providing an apt play on words describing himself as a smart-ass, a term typically referring to a person who takes verbal jabs designed to make people laugh by making fun of something. He’s also referring to his intellect and his own ability to think, to solve problems, and to recognize opportunity when he uses the word smart. As Bodie utters the words, “Unless they some smart-ass pawns,” (Simon, 2011) he takes responsibility for his life and for the choices that he will make. He knows the pawns get “capped” quickly, and he is determined to make it to the other side. He sees the game as a way to improve his life’s circumstances if he follows the rules smartly. Greene’s reference to chess pieces is also espoused by a philosophy that depicts people as ends rather than means. (1995). Expendable people are means to get somewhere else. Bodie

applies this very notion to himself. The next example jumps forward four seasons to the end of Bodie's life as he expresses outrage at the notion introduced here in season one that his life and the lives of others matter and are not expendable nor should they be viewed as surplus. Everybody matters regardless of who holds the power.

### **Third Example—Bodie's Execution**

Dewey's changing notion of truth for an individual aids this characters discovery that all people matter. As Bodie moves through seasons, he is implored and questioned by drug CFO Stringer Bell, played by Idris Elba, to kill his friend Wallace as a matter of business at the end of season one, earns his own corner in season two, and begins to question the changing nature of his community in season three. Bodie continues to survive and even thrive throughout the series in spite of power struggles. As the killing progresses without reserve in season four, Bodie realizes that the new power has rewritten the rules of the old game described in the chess scene. There is no teaching, there is no caring for members of your own group. When one missing friend is discovered long-dead late one night in a boarded up row house in season four, Bodie's impassioned outrage kicking out police car windows earns him a spot in jail for the night. Even though he recognizes himself and the corner boys as pawns, as foot soldiers, he also recognizes that lives still matter and should not

be hidden from view inside the boarded up row houses—as if they never mattered.

At the beginning of season two on a trip to Philadelphia, Bodie and a co-worker are only able to pick up a radio station that's playing NPR's "Prairie Home Companion." The two discuss that radio stations in Baltimore are different from radio stations in Philadelphia, and viewers realize how naïve the young Bodie really is. He ends that dialogue by quipping, "Why would anyone want to leave Baltimore man, that's what I'm asking?" (Simon, 2011).

Partly by happy circumstance, I spent a fall afternoon talking with a woman named Paula, who lived in a public housing low-rise neighborhood on Baltimore's Westside. We stood together in line an hour and a half, waiting to tour the Edgar Allen Poe home, recently renovated in her neighborhood. It was also just two blocks north of Fayette Street, a primary set location for the series ten years earlier. In response to my inquiry of her traveling outside of the city, she said she had not ever been outside of Baltimore and then added that she had no desire to leave the city because the city of Baltimore was home. Waiting in line we talked about kids, weed, Dansko shoes and because it was close to Halloween and we were waiting outside the Poe home, we talked about death. She said she had watched someone die—saw him take his last breath.

In the following scene—season four, episode thirteen—viewers are three years and forty-nine episodes away from D'Angelo Barksdale's explanation of

the chess game. Detective Jimmy McNulty, played by Dominic West, and Bodie are sitting on a park bench located just four miles north of the location of Bodie's chess lesson from season one and from where I stood talking with Paula one afternoon. Having never traveled that far uptown and surrounded by manicured gardens, Bodie asks McNulty if they are still in Baltimore. The chess allegory takes place in season one, episode three. Though Bodie clearly remembers it, the series' other "smart-ass" character Detective McNulty, trying to be helpful chimes in with one word, "pawns." Bodie, older and wiser, has already recognized the analogy between his circumstance and his role as pawn and soldier and uses the tool of moral imagination to make sense of his next steps.

The only ways out of the game for someone in Bodie's predicament are to become a police informant, regarded by every soldier as the lowest of the low, or to die. In this case the individual's truth breaks a code far worse than lying. Of the impact of individual acts Dewey notes,

For each of us, there are some acts we believe we ought to die rather than commit. Which acts these are will differ from epoch to epoch, and from person to person, but to be a moral agent is to be unable to imagine living with oneself after committing these acts, (Rorty, 1998, p.33).

Bodie, himself a killer and drug dealer, is unable to continue his role as a soldier in recognition of the flagrant violations against human lives to those like himself, also struggles under the notion of breaking the rules to become a snitch. He

refers below to the amoral game rules introduced by the ruthless Marlo Stanfield, played by Jamie Hector, an emergent young drug entrepreneur whom Bodie holds responsible for the rampant, nameless killings being stashed and stored in boarded-up and deserted Baltimore row houses. Bodie identifies Marlo Stanfield and his gang as a major game player existing strangely outside of acknowledged game rules. He engages the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice to justify his thought process to snitch by identifying Marlo's power as oppressive and taking responsibility for his own ability to bring an end to the oppression.

**“Final Grades,” Season 4, Episode 13, 38:40 (Simon, 2011).**

BODIE  
We still in the city?

MCNULTY  
Cylburn Arboretum, Pimlico's right up the hill.

BOTH ARE EATING LUNCH ON A BENCH, BIRDS CHIRPING, MANICURED LAWN, STATUES, GARDENS IN VIEW

BODIE  
Just nice. I ain't no snitch.

MCNULTY  
Didn't say you were.

BODIE  
I been doing this a long time; I ain't never said nothing to no cop

MCNULTY  
[STILL CHEWING]

BODIE

I feel old. I been out there since I was 13. I ain't never fucked up a count, never stole off a package, never did some shit that I wasn't told to do, I been straight up. But what come back Hmm? You think if I get jammed up on some shit they be like "A'ight, Bodie been there, we hang tough. We got his pay lawyer, we got a bail." They want me to stand with them right? But where the fuck they at when they supposed to be standing by us? I mean when shit goes bad and its hell to pay where they at? This game is rigged man, we like the little bitches on the chessboard.

MCNULTY

Pawns.

Also in this scene, Detective McNulty compliments Bodie using a familiar saying, "You're a soldier, Bodie," (Simon, 2011). The phrase "You're a soldier," is heard often throughout the series as a way of recognizing someone's effort to shoulder responsibility for the good of the whole drug operation. It doesn't necessarily mean to self-sacrifice as in "Pawns get capped quick," but instead refers to a sense of duty. The phrase "You're a soldier," is a valued compliment.

BODIE

Yo I'm not snitching on none of my boys. Not my corner and not no Barksdale people, what's left of them. But Marlo, this nigger and his kind man, they gotta fall, they gotta.

MCNULTY

For that to happen somebody's gotta step up

BODIE

I do what I gotta. I don't give a fuck. Just don't ask me to live on my fucking knees, you know?

MCNULTY

You're a soldier Bodie

A soldier is more than someone fighting on the front lines. A soldier is someone who takes responsibility not only for his own well-being but for the well-being of others in his community. A soldier stands up for his people, regardless of harm to self. For example, someone who is serving time in prison because he did not cooperate with police as a snitch to lighten his prison sentence is often referred to as a soldier—it is a title bearing honor.

BODIE

[UNDER HIS BREATH, UNSURE] Hell yeah. [STARTS CHEWING AGAIN.]

CAMERA PULLS OUT TO SHOW LARGE RECTANGULAR AREA, LINED WITH CYPRESS, STATUES. CRISP, GRAY WINTER DAY. BODIE AND MCNULTY STILL SITTING ON BENCH TO THE SIDE.

[END SCENE.]

In the next scene at night, drug-rival executioners come after Bodie while he works with his crew on a dimly lit street corner. Viewers do not know if Bodie has snitched or not in the hours between his discussion in the gardens with Detective McNulty and this night-time scene. The rivals watched Bodie get in a car with McNulty that morning which is all the proof they need of his intent. Instead of running away with the rest of his crew, Bodie deliberately takes out his own gun and starts firing at the approaching shadows saying, “I’m not going to end up in a row house, come get me.” He is shouting to everyone around and also to himself that his experience matters, that other lives matter. In the end, he identifies himself as a person who matters.



**“Final Grades,” Season 4, Episode 13, 47:05 (Simon, 2011).**

NIGHT. STREET CORNER. THERE IS MOVEMENT, BUT IT’S DARK AND HARD TO SEE.

STREET VOICE

Icicles! Get em while it’s going. Icicles! Go on!

Throughout the show, drugs are marketed as popular topics in the news. This particular night is cold, the characters breath forms puffs of smoke as they speak and they are wearing heavy coats, thus the naming convention “Icicles;” in other scenes the drugs are referred to as WMD’s (ironically Weapons of Mass Destruction) or Rockefeller.

BODIE

Yo, Spider, what’s the count?

SPIDER

I don’t even think we gonna sell out today man

BODIE

[SPITS, SEES MOVEMENT UP THE SIDEWALK]

POOT

Yo, Bodie...Yo, BODIE!

POOT AND BODIE SEE TWO SHADOW FIGURES MOVING CLOSER; BODIE STANDS GROUND ANXIOUSLY

STREET VOICE

Icicles! Icicles!

POOT

Yo Bodie, you better run, yo.

BODIE IS REACHING INTO THE GUTTER FOR HIS FIREARM.

BODIE

Yo, this my corner. I ain't running nowhere.

POOT

Bodie is you crazy?

BODIE HAS HIS FIREARM DRAWN, AND IS SEARCHING THE STREET FOR A TARGET. HE POINTS IT UP THE SIDEWALK, SEES SOMETHING MOVE AND FIRES IT SHATTERING A CAR WINDOW. THE CORNER BOYS RUN IN ALL DIRECTIONS.

STREET VOICE TWO

Shit is on!

BODIE

Run with it, motherfuckers! I don't give a fuck! I'm right here. You ain't putting me up in one of them empty-ass houses, neither.

POOT

Bodie, [PLEADING] come on man.  
[RUNS OFF]

BODIE BACKS UP FIRING HIS GUN AT NOTHING WHEN A HOODED, NAMELESS, SHADOWED FIGURE EMERGES FROM A NEARBY DOOR AND SHOOTS HIM IN THE BACK OF THE HEAD. BODIE FALLS FACE DOWN. THE FIGURE SHOOTS HIM AGAIN IN THE BACK OF THE HEAD AS HE LAYS MOTIONLESS ON THE SIDEWALK. CHRIS AND SNOOP COME UP FROM BEHIND THE CARS, NOD AT EACH OTHER, AND LEAVE.

[END SCENE.]

Bodie, who does not want to become a nameless and discarded victim, is executed by a nameless assassin. Viewers never discover who the hooded figure is, and there is much discussion in cyberspace about whether or not it was someone Bodie knew. However, in calling out his attackers on the street,

he knows enough to realize that a murder committed in public will not go completely unnoticed. He tragically refuses to die on his knees as so many of the nameless victims discovered in the boarded-up row-houses have died.

### **Theme Two: A Changing Notion of Truth**

The next theme discusses Dewey's changing notion of truth as a fundamental perspective to individual interpretations of lived experience. This notion is most poignantly demonstrated through shifting power figures woven throughout seasons and episodes of *The Wire*; a changing notion of truth also exhibits and justifies shifts of power throughout the story. Dominant ideologies illustrated in the changing rules of engagement for the drug trade also change the truth for individuals living against the confines of the drug community. For Dewey, individual interaction with his or her surroundings becomes a new truth for that individual; the truth changes from person to person because experiences and people differ. There is not an extant, authoritarian, immovable truth that exists outside of experience to be attained by human beings; truth continually changes and impacts the experience of individuals. He notes that individual "expressions, projections and extensions" (Dewey, 1939, p.227) are "in innumerable ways the products of our dispositions towards one another and of our view of ourselves in relation to each other," (Kadlec, p.127) and our institutions. As truths emerge, dominant ideologies evolve and powers shift until experience changes truths again.

Utilizing moral imagination to interpret the shifts of power opens up the space to discuss the impact of the shifts upon the individuals, valuing a pluralistic perspective in the way that people perceive and act in the world. Televised serial drama may be the last place to tease out notions of democracy. Linda Williams, University of California, Berkeley professor in film and media rhetoric writes,

In the microcosm of one decaying American city, we see the interconnected truths of many institutional failures—rampant drug trade and thus the failure of police and law, declining unions and thus the decrease of the very value of work, a cynical city government and the failure of reform, the poignant waste of schools, and a media that cannot see the truth of what is revealed before its very eyes, (2011, p.208).

Utilizing *The Wire* as a way of getting at the complexities inherent to a changing notion of truth illustrates how experience is negotiated individually; the experience of individuals in community matters. Aided by the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice, the experience of all has the chance to create a common experience where oppression is obsolete and the rights of individuals to live with dignity are supported by all.

Used as a tool, moral imagination focuses thought and action toward possibilities in recognition of preserving human life. Dewey's notion of a constantly changing truth underscores the role of self as a contributing member of community. Moral imagination helps us to recognize that particular situated-

ness by focusing attention outwardly onto the lives of others. “Dewey embraces what we might call social self-creation,” (Garrison, 2011, p.292). He writes, “No amount of outer obstacles can stave off the happiness that comes from lively and ever renewed interests in others and in the conditions and objects which promote their development,” (1984). Recognizing that truth changes from person to person, the next section follows connections uncovered through moral imagination where key characters create, encounter, expose and identify the cultural shadows and borders that shape, change and mold the everyday. The examples represented through these characters and their histories show the capability of recreating selves in spite of situations and in response to a changing community, always redefining their role in relationship to the larger whole.

Critics and academics applaud the series because the writers provide no absolute truths, composite solutions, or solid answers. *The Wire* offers a valid space with conflicting options to think about the possibilities; it also offers multiple instances where the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice is used. “*The Wire* offers its viewers a critique of institutional power and the discourses of truth associated with such power,” (Fuggle, 2009, p.1). The experience of watching *The Wire* becomes much clearer by adopting Purpel’s framework of the possibility of possibilities accompanied by a need for holistic education; there are many sides to each story presented throughout the series.

The lack of safe spaces portrayed episode to episode ironically provides a safe space to knead discussions of Dewey's changing notion of truth, and its relation to self and community.

The scene entitled "Snot Boogie" is important at the onset of the series in its ability to set the stage and to introduce a major character, the ever-questioning Detective Jimmy McNulty, played by Dominic West. The scene exhibits that the actions of one person can irrevocably change the rules of a particular game for the others. Actions impact truths. The second example entitled, "No body, no victim who doesn't matter," reveals another instance of changing rules of play and changing notions of truths as Detective Bunk, played by Wendell Peirce, and Omar Little, played by Michael K. Williams, discuss the way individuals, and particularly the children, were supported and held fast within communities. The discussion becomes more than how things were better in the old days, but draws specific parallels about the characteristics of communities where people felt connected to one another.

The third example depicts a blatant game reorganization as the rules change violently in "Sunday morning truce" —presumably a safe zone akin to the spot of "home" in a child's game of freeze tag. A thoughtless decision by two individuals simply following orders without thinking changes the notion of truth for characters who thought they were safe from harm on a Sunday morning

and results in a different course of action for the entire series based on the repercussions from one individual.

The final “Debate” example is lengthy, but precisely captures and encapsulates reactions from multiple viewpoints as the current mayor and political challenger vehemently debate the changing notion of truth for the city of Baltimore. The scene illustrates that truth changes from individual to individual and from group to group. The debate is fierce in its ability to call out institutional failures, systemic dysfunction and the ensuing effect upon the lives of citizens. It is also a subtle reminder of the changing notion of truth for each individual as viewers watch varying individual and group responses to the debate itself. The scene ends with Namond Brice, played by Julito McCullum, one of Bodie’s corner boys in season three whose father is in prison, as he switches the channel to play Halo 2, a simulated point-and-shoot video game. The changing truths presented in the narrative of the debate scene affects the lived experience of citizens of the city, but are hardly noticed by others.

### **First Example—Snot Boogie**

This particular scene from the series aptly illustrates what Dewey defines as “the subtle shadings of a developing and pervading hue,” (1934) of a democratic society where oppression is lifted and dignity upheld for all. As the first scene of the first season of the entire series, viewers don’t realize that this exchange outlines the entire story arc of one of the lead characters, Omar Little.

Part gangster, part hero, Omar Little robs from the rich and gives to the poor, predictably without fail. In the scene following, Detective McNulty questions a witness sitting on the sidewalk beside a dead body trying to understand why somebody changed the rules and shot the guy they all liked, and also begrudgingly allowed him to steal from the crap game every week. Somehow the rules changed and Snot Boogie is dead on the sidewalk. Likewise, at the end of season five it is the series' hero Omar Little who is found dead, the victim of a neighborhood child who was simply hanging out in the convenience store Omar frequented. Omar Little, who stole from the toughest of the tough and constantly had his street-smart guard up, simply nodded at the child upon entering and would probably have given the child money on the way out of the store; instead the rules changed—the children became dangerous—and the child shot him in the back of the head. When Snot Boogie is shot for the same thing he does every single week, it signals to viewers that truth is indeed in a state of constant flux throughout the series. What was true the day before, that you could take winnings from the group without being harmed, was undeniably altered in the opening scene of the first season. Snot Boogie's real name? Omar.

**“The Target,” Season 1, Episode 1, 1:07 (Simon, 2011).**

EXT. STREET CORNER/WEST BALTIMORE – NIGHT; CLOSE-UP ON  
MCNULTY AND WITNESS



MCNULTY  
So, who shot Snot?

WITNESS  
I ain't going to no court.  
[both men pause listening, a dog is barking in the distance]

WITNESS  
Motherfucker ain't have to put no cap in him though.

MCNULTY  
Definitely not.

WITNESS  
He could've just whipped his ass, like we always whip his ass.

MCNULTY  
I agree with you.

WITNESS  
He gonna kill snot. Snot been doing the same shit since I don't know how long.  
Kill a man over some bullshit...I'm saying, I mean every Friday night in the alley  
behind the cut-rate we rolling bones, you know? I mean all the boys from around  
the way, we roll till late.

MCNULTY  
Alley crap game, right?

WITNESS  
And like every time, Snot, he'd fade a few shooters. Play it out till the pot's dep.  
Then he'd snatch and run.

MCNULTY  
Every time?

WITNESS  
Couldn't help hisself.

MCNULTY  
Let me understand you, every Friday night you and your boys will shoot crap  
right? And every Friday night your pal Snot Boogie he'd wait 'till there was cash  
on the ground and then he'd grab the money and run away? You let him do  
that?

WITNESS

If we'd catch him we'd beat his ass but ain't nobody never go past that.

MCNULTY

I gotta ask you, if every time Snot Boogie would grab the money and run away why'd you even let him in the game?

WITNESS

What?

MCNULTY

Snot Boogie always stole the money, why'd you let him play?

WITNESS

Got to. This America, man.

CAMERA PULLS OUT TO SHOW A DEAD SNOT BOOGIE, EYES WIDE OPEN, LAYING ON THE CURB MAYBE TEN FEET IN FRONT OF MCNULTY AND THE WITNESS.

[END SCENE]

Dewey believed if people understood how the world around them connected to and impacted self, that individuals could achieve the highest amount of satisfaction, (Menand, 2001, p. 237). Snot Boogie and the following excerpts illustrate how experiencing change impacts the lives of individuals who continually experience and adjust to this change.

### **Second Example—Nobody, No Victim**

Dewey's notion of connection through shared histories is manifest in the following example. In the series pitch notes for the pilot episode setting, Simon writes, "Despite all the problems inherent, there is a deep if peculiar affection for the city felt...by its residents. The past is always present here... a remnant of old

America as it struggles to make itself into part of the new,” (Simon, 2000). The next example shows two Baltimore residents from the same generation and from the same neighborhood; one became a police detective, one emerged as a gangster neighborhood hero. Detective Bunk, played by Wendell Pierce, wears a tailored suit and tie to work every day. He is a heavy drinker after work, loves his wife but isn’t faithful, and grimaces and growls as one of the grumpiest in the police force. He likes the thrill of the chase, but for the most part stays on the right side of the law, following the rules and not bucking authority. He says to Omar Little, “I was a few years ahead of you at Edmonson,” (Simon, 2011) naming the neighborhood high school which is referred to again by other characters in later seasons.

In the next example, Bunk is meeting with Omar Little presumably to solve a murder crime involving a mutual acquaintance and to hopefully retrieve a stolen police firearm. There is no established relationship between these two, and Bunk has worked hard to maneuver the meeting, calling in favors to meet with this man. Detective Bunk is merely trying to improve his clearance rate; this case is one of many on a white board with Bunk’s name assigned.

Midway through the cat and mouse discussion between the two, Omar changes the tone of the conversation saying, “The way y’all look at things, ain’t no victim to even speak on,” (Simon, 2011). He’s saying that the woman who died in the case Bunk is questioning is not recognized by the police department

as anyone that matters. She is collateral damage even to the police. Knowing there is some truth to Omar's charge, the usually smooth and composed Detective Bunk responds to the challenge and digs deep beneath the statistics of clearance rates delivering an impromptu declaration perfectly describing a changing notion of truth for community—the way things used to be when people shared responsibility looking out for one another. Detective Bunk punctuates his speech by expressing utter disgust at the new truth of the situation in which he now finds himself growling, “It makes me sick...how far we have fell.” Here the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice is used to explore the changing notion of truth for both individuals and for communities.

**“Homecoming” Season 3, Episode 6, 41:48 (Simon, 2011).**

DETECTIVE BUNK WALKS TOWARD OMAR, WHO IS SITTING ON A BENCH IN WHAT LOOKS LIKE AN OLDER COVERED BUS STOP, RED PAINT PEELING, NEAR A PARK. BUNK SITS DOWN AND PUFFS ON A CIGAR WHILE OMAR LOOKS THE OTHER WAY. BIRDS CHIRP IN BACKGROUND THROUGHOUT ENTIRE SCENE.

[BOTH MEN SPEAK SITTING FACING STRAIGHT AHEAD]

BUNK

Your message said you'd be here, still, kind of thought it'd be one of your minions that showed up in the flesh

OMAR

You called on some of my people's people

BUNK

I was just working. Doing what a MAN is supposed to do.

OMAR

Oh I know you been busy...caught some talk from them young men you roused  
over on the west side

BUNK

That was about a gun belonged to the police

Detective Bunk does not miss the opportunity to get in his first dig by telling Omar that he is not a man because of his criminal lifestyle. Omar retains an indifferent composure throughout the majority of this scene, though by the end of Bunk's speech his eyes and actions communicate intense rage-filled sorrow.

OMAR

Yeh, caught some talk about that too

BUNK

[TURNS TO FACE OMAR]

This here, this about something else. Girl by the name of Tasha got her head  
blown off in a firefight

OMAR

[LOOKS STRAIGHT AHEAD AND BARELY NODS]

BUNK

[LOOKS BACK AT HIM, EYEBROWS RAISED]

If you're not here to cooperate then why are you here?

OMAR

[LOOKS OVER IN DISDAIN, THEN TURNS HIS HEAD FORWARD AGAIN  
WITHOUT SAYING A WORD]

BUNK

Then I could just pull up that other girl from your squad

OMAR

She ain't going to talk to you; ain't nobody gonna talk to you. I just came here to  
make that clear man.

BUNK

Ain't no thing. Cuz I already got me an eyeball wit.

OMAR

You do? I don't know about that. Old bruiser he be blind behind that fortified half the time. Shit you gonna have to dry him out just to get him on the stands. Besides, he done had a change of heart to that story. That's what I heard anyway. You past that. Y'all gonna have to call this one of those "cost of doing business things" you police be talking about all the time. You feel me? No taxpayers. Shit the way y'all look on things, ain't no victim to even speak on.

Omar knows the rules of the game; he knows that the death of his friend will not be reported on the evening news and that to the police, she is no more than another statistic. Here he communicates that there is not a victim because her life did not matter to people outside the community—in which he is also placing Bunk as part of the outside. At the beginning of the dialogue Omar uses the phrase "my people's people." He is not implying that he owns them or that they work for him. With "my people" he is implying that he cares for them and accepts responsibility for them.

BUNK

Bullshit boy. No victim? I just came from Tasha's people, remember? All this death, you don't think that ripples out?  
[ANGRILY] You don't even know what the fuck I'm talking about.

Bunk again uses the term "boy" to imply that Omar is not living up to his responsibilities. Earlier Bunk implied that Omar was not a man, here he calls him boy even though Omar is probably in his late twenties and clearly not a

child. Bunk is deliberately attempting to get him riled, but Omar does not speak back. At the end of the scene Detective Bunk angrily stomps away; Omar's eyelids are heavy and his jaw clenched, he snorts and spits in an effort to clear his throat but otherwise continues looking straight ahead as Bunk walks away. Not only has the truth of the community changed as Bunk pointed out, but the truth of how Omar sees his role in the community changes at this moment as well.

[BUNK GETS UP LEAVES BENCH]

I was a few years ahead of you at Edmondson. But I know you remember the neighborhood, how it was. We had some bad boys for real. It wasn't about guns so much as knowing what to do with your hands, those boys could really rack. My father had me on the straight, but like any young man I wanted to be hard too, so I'd turn up at all the house parties where all the tough boys hung. Shit, they knew I wasn't one of them. Them hard cases would come up to me and say, 'go home schoolboy, you don't belong here.' Didn't realize at the time what they were doing for me. As rough as that neighborhood could be, we had us a community. Nobody, no victim, who didn't matter. And now all we got is bodies, and predatory motherfuckahs like you. And our where that girl fell, I saw kids acting like Omar, calling you by name, glorifyin' your ass. Makes me sick, motherfuckah, how far we done fell.

[END SCENE.]

Detective Bunk's sermon connecting commonalities implores Omar Little to take responsibility for others' lived experiences as part of a community. He uses their shared histories to illustrate the notion of a changing truth for individuals as he interprets what he assumes to be Omar's disdain and

indifference for the present, using Omar's initial gripe that there was "no victim to really speak on," as he reminds Omar that once there was a community where everybody mattered. Greene reminds us that cultural identity should not be fixed or be seen as an absolute (1988) because that fixed mindset prevents us from interpreting a novel experience. Detective Bunk argues against the notion that people do not matter by remembering and exploring a shared communal history where everybody mattered and in the process provides valid evidence that perceptions and responsibilities should be directly related. He doesn't say, "You make me sick," to Omar. He re-situates himself in Omar's community and expands his own realm of responsibility by ending his monologue with the inclusive "we."

### **Third Example—The Sunday Morning Truce**

If it were not for the life and death subject matter, the next scene featured in the ninth episode in the third season entitled "Slapstick," would be almost comical. The storyline juxtaposes the stalking and attempted murder of neighborhood gangster Omar Little against another scene with a room full of drug dealers conducting a business meeting on a Sunday morning. The drug dealers are actually trying to unionize to fend off aggressive New York and Dominican Republic drug-ring infiltrations. Leader Stringer Bell, played by Idris Elba, raps a gavel, asks the room to come to order, and insists that the chair recognizes a person before that person speaks. In the middle of his charade,



Stringer Bell receives a call from two soldiers who have tracked down Omar Little outside of his grandmother's home; they are asking Stringer whether or not to violate the rules of the game by shooting at someone on a Sunday morning. Stringer, his attention divided by the business meeting, says sure. In this example, the tool of moral imagination is kept under wraps; the ensuing violation changes the truth, the power shifts, and the game intensifies for everyone.

**“Slapstick,” Season 3, Episode 9, 6:38 (Simon, 2011).**

OMAR GETS OUT OF CAB AND WALKS UP SIDEWALK TO HOUSE.

SAM  
Yo, is that him?

GERARD  
Shit if it ain't we'd only be wasting a bullet  
Only problem is it being Sunday morning and all, you know? (Sits momentarily  
then reaches for phone)

SAM  
Who you calling?

GERARD  
Slim Charles, man.

SCENE SWITCH TO STRINGER BELL'S SUNDAY MORNING EAST SIDE,  
WEST SIDE SUNDAY MORNING BUSINESS MEETING

(gets no answer)

SAM  
Nigger probably sleeping in.  
(REACHES FOR ANOTHER PHONE)

SCENE SWITCH TO STRINGER'S BUSINESS MEETING, PHONE CALL  
COMES THROUGH

SHAMROCK

Who this?

GERARD

Yeh it's me. You want the house where the dude is, you know

SHAMROCK

Talk nigger

GERARD

Man I'm trying not to use names. It's Gerard man, and we're on Omar. He gonna come out of the house.

YOUNG TEENAGER WALKS OVER TO STRINGER BELL AT HEAD OF  
TABLE AT BUSINESS MEETING AND WAITS BESIDE HIM

STRINGER

[MUMBLING] What is it?

SHAMROCK

Gerard and Sam got their sights on Omar. Tried to reach Slim and he ain't answering

STRINGER

You sure?

SHAMROCK

It's church day Sunday morning you know

STRINGER

They sure it's him?

SHAMROCK

Nods affirmatively

STRINGER

All right do it.

SHAMROCK

Do it.

GERARD HANGS UP. SAM TOUCHES HIS ARM.

SAM  
They right there.

CAMERA SHOWS OMAR ESCORTING HIS GRANDMOTHER SLOWLY TO THE CAB WHERE REYNOLDO WAITS. OMAR CHUCKLES AT SOMETHING THE GRANDMOTHER SAID, OPENS THE CAR DOOR FOR HER, HEARS CHURCH BELLS CALLING AND LOOKS UP TO SEE GERANRD AND SAM COMING TOWARD HIM REACHING FOR THEIR GUNS. OMAR FORCEFULLY SHOVES HIS GRANDMOTHER IN THE CAR BY PUTTING HIS HAND ON HER HEAD AND JAMMING HER IN TO THE CAB. HE THEN JUMPS IN ON TOP OF HER AND THE CAB PEELS AWAY.

GRANDMOTHER  
Oh my word!

HER SUNDAY HAT FALLS OFF INTO THE STREET AND GETS CRUSHED BY THE CAB, GLASS FALLING EVERYWHERE. CHURCH BELLS ARE STILL CHIMING THE HOUR.

SAM  
I definitely hit him.

LATER THAT NIGHT AT THE BARKSDALE HIDEOUT, SLIM CHARLES HOLDING A MANGLED LADIES HAT IN HIS HUGE HANDS.

SLIM CHARLES  
A Sunday morning!

GERARD  
We called to ask!

SAM  
Shamrock said to go!

SLIM CHARLES  
On a Sunday morning! Y'all try to hit a nigger when he taking his wrinkled ass grandmas to pray? And y'all don't hit the nigger neither? All y'all kill is his grandma's crown?

The character of Slim Charles, played by DC radio host and funk band singer Anwan Glover, is definitely old school, following the rules without question and appalled at the situation in which he finds himself now. He is high up the pecking order of the Barksdale drug gang. He is also a huge imposing man, “a 6-foot-6-inch streetwise Genghis Khan of a hellraiser who was shot 13 times” (Milloy, 2011) growing up in the Washington DC neighborhood of Columbia Heights. Although he abides by the rules of the game and will kill on command without a second thought, he employs moral imagination to illustrate the depth of Gerard and Sam’s mistake.

GERARD

By the time Sham say go, Omar damn near in the cab

SLIM CHARLES

[SHAKING HEAD WHILE SPEAKING] It ain’t enough y’all done violated the Sunday morning truce. No! I’m standing here holding a torn up church crown of a bona fide colored lady. Do you know what a colored lady is? Not your moms for sure. Cause if they was that, y’all would have known better than that BULL SHIT. Y’all trifling with Avon Barksdale’s reputation here, you know that?

SCENE CUT TO REYNOLDO, KIMMIE, AND OMAR TALKING

REYNOLDO

She alright though?

OMAR

She got cut in the head with the glass, and she’s sore from where I fell on her but other than that

KIMMIE

Saved her ass huh?

OMAR

I damn near got that woman killed yo. Y'all should have seen me inside of that hospital while they was stitching her up lying about why someone want to shoot me from down the street. That woman think I work at a cafeteria.

KIMMIE

Cafeteria?

OMAR

At the airport, yeah!

KIMMIE

The airport, why the airport?

OMAR

Because I know she ain't never going to go down there to go dining, that's why

KIMMIE

[CHUCKLES]

OMAR

[ANGRILY] Yo Kimmie this ain't funny yo. That woman raised me! And for as long as I've been grown, once a month, I've been with her on a church Sunday telling myself ain't no need to worry because ain't nobody in this city that low down to disrespect a Sunday morning!?!]

SITS DOWN, REGAINS COMPSURE.

OMAR

Y'all know I was going to walk away right? Y'all know that right? I mean, after Tasha, I was going to leave them people be yo.

REYNOLDO

Avon home now

OMAR

[STANDING UP, AGITATED AGAIN] Oh Barksdale got to go. Stringer too. This thing got to end man. I swear to God yo on a Sunday morning they damn near shot her best crown off yo. I mean, no shame them niggers. Y'all feel me?!!]

SITS DOWN, TOUCHES NOSE, LOOKING DOWN, BREATHES DEEPLY.

[END SCENE.]

This episode's title "Slapstick" sets viewers up for a comic routine that is not really funny; the original intent of the stalking scene was the taking of a human life. As an illustration of a changing notion of truth and its effects upon communities of individuals, the rhythm could not be more perfect as viewers switch from neighborhood sidewalk, to business meeting, to backroom office. The rules of the game change the moment a shot is heard and a church-going grandmother is caught in the line of fire.

#### **Fourth Example—The Debate**

In season four, fed up with the laissez-faire attitude of the mayor's office, two formerly allied councilmen, Tommy Carcetti, played by Aiden Gillen, and Tony Brown, played by Christopher Mann, run in opposition not only to each other but also after the incumbent Mayor Royce, played by Glenn Turman. Councilman Carcetti is fired up and fed up with the misdeeds he witnesses coming out of the mayor's office. He bucks the Baltimore political system and surprisingly throws his name into the mayoral ring, desperately wanting to be the individual to bring about positive collaborative change. The following scene is lengthy but illustrates a changing notion of truth through dialogue in the quickly changing camera angles as different groups of people watching the debate at the same time through different televisions and settings, exhibit a wide range of

interpretations and perceived outcomes. The following example illustrates Dewey's notion of the varying hues of a developing color of individual interpretation and the importance of this interpretation to the whole picture; but more importantly that all interpretations are important and relevant to the whole. Here and throughout the series Simon also echoes the outrage of modern philosophers who decry that the principles of politicians are sacrificed "on the altar of special interests...[and that] media watchdogs have sacrificed the voice of dissent on the altar of audience competition," (West, 2004, p. 28). Simon also uses this scene to introduce the character of Namond Brice, played by Julito McCullum, who by the beginning of season five is transformed through his unique educational experience from corner boy to well-spoken, informed debater.

**"Soft Eyes," Season 4, Episode 2, 51:35, (Simon, 2011).**

A POLITICAL DEBATE STAGE BETWEEN MAYOR ROYCE, COUNCILMAN TOMMY CARCETTI, AND COUNCILMAN TONY GRAY. THE DEBATE IS SHOWN ON TELEVISIONS SITUATED IN THE POLICE STATION, THE CITY COUNCIL, CARCETTI CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS, THE LOCAL BAR, NAMOND'S BEDROOM, CUTTY'S BEDROOM, AND OTHER SPOTS

MAYOR ROYCE

And for either of my opponents to suggest that downtown development comes at the expense of our city's neighborhoods, well that's just unfair and, uh, divisive. For them to suggest that my administration has not been responsive, well...

CARCETTI

Economic development cannot be a Band-Aid. It is a long-term process that requires commitment to retraining our workforce and, as I said before, this can only be successful in a city where people

feel safe. So before we can even begin to think about luring new industries to Baltimore, we need to think about how we can make these neighborhoods and this city safe once again.

CAMERA BACK TO DEBATE STAGE AND LIVE AUDIENCE SEATING

MAYOR ROYCE

Mr. Carcetti may think it's in his interest to exploit people's fears. He's been doing it throughout this campaign. I'm offended by it personally but the fact is that violent crime is down citywide, and our police department is working hard to keep it that way, and will continue to do so under my administration.

MODERATOR

Councilman Carcetti, you have two minutes to respond.

CARCETTI

Does anyone in this room really believe that crime is down in Baltimore?

MAYOR ROYCE

You calling me a liar Tommy?

MODERATOR

Gentlemen, please. No personal interactions. Councilman Carcetti.

CARCETTI

Can the Mayor honestly tell the people of Rosemont, of Belair Edison, of Highlandtown or Cherry Hill there's less drug-dealing, less violence? Any statistics coming from the police department cannot be trusted because under this mayor, the police are more concerned with protecting Clarence Royce politically than fighting crime. There's no leadership and morale has never been lower. I'll change that.

SCENE SWITCHES TO CUTTY WATCHING DEBATES LOUNGING IN BED, HOLDING A TV REMOTE.

CARCETTI

It's business as usual down at City Hall and as a result, our response to crime has been characterized time and time again by wanton indifference.



CUTTY SWITCHES CHANNELS TO A FOOTBALL GAME. SCENE SWITCHES TO THE DETECTIVES OFFICE.

CARCETTI

What do I mean by business as usual? What do I mean by wanton indifference? Well, last night in West Baltimore, on Lanvale Street, another citizen was shot and killed. This time the victim was a key witness in a drug case that had yet to come to court. Courageously, this man had agreed to testify in two weeks time in that case. The police should have been protecting him. They were not, and he was murdered.

CAMERA CUTS TO DETECTIVE BUNK AND SARGEANT JAY LANDSMAN WATCHING AT POLICE STATION. THE LATTER HAS A “ON NO HE DID NOT” SMIRK ON HIS FACE. VIEWERS HEAR CARCETTI’S VOICE AS THEY WATCH THE TV; LANDSMAN IS CHARACTERISTICALLY GLUTTONOUSLY EATING.

DETECTIVE BUNK

Oh, shit.[TO LANDSMAN] You’re prime-time, Eddie.

CARCETTI

Why? Because this mayor would not spend the money to protect him. Now I have no doubt that in a moment or two

CAMERA GOES TO DELEGATE WATKINS WATCHING TV IN OFFICE.

Delegate Watkins, played by Frederick Strother, is an older African American male, confined to a wheel chair. He is able to rally the black ministers and their church congregations, and will eventually swing their votes to Councilman Carcetti, the white opponent to the incumbent mayor. This seems to be the first time in the series that he takes notice of Councilman Carcetti, a man who self-identifies earlier in this episode, “I still wake up white in a city that ain’t,” (Simon, 2011).

CARCETTI

Clarence Royce will accuse me of exploiting this man's death for my own political purpose. But the truth is, a year ago I wrote the mayor a letter, I have copies for anyone who wants one. I begged him to spend the money and make witness protection a priority. He ignored me. I even teamed up with our legislative leaders – Delegate Watkins and others—to get matching funds for witness protection approved in Annapolis. And incredibly those matching funds were never claimed by this administration. Now to mention this now may be exploitive, I don't know, I only know it's true, and on such truths I ask the voters of our city to consider a change.

APPLAUSE BY AUDIENCE. CARCETTI LOOKS OVER AT ROYCE CONDEMNINGLY.

MODERATOR

Folks please, please hold your applause until after the round of questions is over. Mayor Royce?

SCENE SWITCHES TO COLONEL RAWLS AND COMMISSIONER BURRELL. COLONEL RAWLS IS WATCHING TV IN HIS OFFICE, REMEMBERING A REPRIMAND GIVEN TO HIM EARLIER.

RAWLS

No more surprises, huh?

[VIEWERS HEAR]

MAYOR ROYCE

I have no idea to the incident to which Councilman Carcetti is referring, uh, so I can't answer that directly, um however I can say that this city places

SCENE SWITCHES BACK TO CARCETTI CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS, PEOPLE ARE SMILING.

MAYOR ROYCE

However, I can say that this city places the highest priority on protecting those citizens

SCENE SWITCHES BACK TO CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS SHAKING HEADS BACK AND FORTH. ONE MAN PLACES HANDS CLASPED AGAINST CHIN WHILE FROWNING, ANOTHER WOMAN REACHES UP TO RUB HER FOREHEAD AS IF SHE HAS A HEADACHE, AND THEN CROSSES HER ARMS

MAYOR ROYCE

...and we will continue to do so. Mr. Carcetti states that he wrote a letter expressing his concerns, and I'm sure that he did.

SCENE SWITCHES TO A VACANT SENATORS, GOVERNORS OR JUDGES OFFICE; VIEWERS HEAR MAYOR ROYCE SPEAKING

MAYOR ROYCE

...and I'm sure that he did, it's easy enough to write letters when all you have to do is write letters.

SCENE SWITCHES BACK TO LIVE DEBATE AND LIVE AUDIENCE

MAYOR ROYCE

But when you are required to run a city on limited resources and balance priorities, well then—well, then you understand that writing letters will not solve the problem! Oh no!

CAMERA SWITCHES TO NAMOND WALKING FROM SEEING HIS MOM ON THE PHONE AND INTO HIS BEDROOM, NEW CLOTHES LAYING OUT ON BED, AND TURNING ON TELEVISION TO SEE DEBATE.

Namond Brice is the only son of Wee-Bay Brice, played by Hassan Johnson, featured in the first season as the right hand man on the streets and by the fourth is serving an extended sentence in prison for his drug-dealing and murder violations. Namond's mother is Delonda Brice, played by Sandi McCree, a stay-at-home-when-she's-not-out-partying mom who constantly urges her thirteen-year-old son to work the corners. She wants him to grow up to be a solider. She takes him to visit his father in prison often, and the father and son share a heartfelt, respectful connection.

COUNCILMAN TONY GRAY

And I don't believe we can get a handle on crime until we get a handle on the schools. Because we need to be thinking about these kids before the corners take them. And this means a renewed focus on our schools...

NAMOND QUICKLY SWITCHES OVER TO PLAY A PARTICULARLY VIOLENT SCENE IN HALO 2 INVOLVING POINT AND SHOOT.

[END SCENE.]

Purpel reminds us that using the tool of moral imagination to advance an agenda at the expense of others is a sacrilege (1999, p. 201), the same way that councilman Tommy Carcetti rebukes the incumbent, complacent and irresponsible Mayor Royce. Greene notes that conversations around policy often include “the dominant voices of officials who assume the objective worth of certain kinds of knowledge,” (1995, p. 9) and seem to think that people and institutions can be manipulated to predetermined states. The conversation between the three candidates illustrates how perceptions of possibilities differ between the three men, but also reaches beyond the candidates to the experience of multiple groups and individuals within those groups who watch. Greene writes that it “takes imagination to break with ordinary classifications,” (p. 14) and to encounter the notion of possibility with courage. Acknowledging a changing truth for each individual allows us to encounter the possibilities outside of predetermined classifications and expectations.

### **Theme Three: Banality and Thoughtlessness**

Moral imagination in the service of social justice is the tool that enables us to act with recognition of the rights of others to thrive, not thwarted by oppression. Dewey stipulates that the type of self that stays faithful to acting with the goal of positively relating to others will “be fuller and broader than one which is cultivated in isolation from or in opposition to the purposes and needs of others,” (Garrison, 2011, p.292); to become the most fully human we must commune with others. In other words acting without consideration of the needs of others to thrive strangles growth for an individual. Without deliberate purposeful interaction in support of preserving human dignity within communities thoughtlessness takes hold; actions unaided by the tool of moral imagination become mechanical and habitual. The next examples depict situations described by characters as “just business,” when the rights of individuals to thrive fall prey to the rules of the game. These examples of banality are extreme because they result in the taking of life in each instance. I’ve chosen these examples because they evolve around the notion of “just business” and because each involves the chief financial and operating officer of the West Side drug business, Stringer Bell, who commits heinous crimes throughout the first three seasons. Others follow his lead and are complicit in his notion of just doing business. Stringer Bell is the boyhood friend of drug kingpin Avon Barksdale, played by Wood Harris, and together the two have built an empire within

Baltimore. Stringer is intent on becoming something more than a drug dealer, and operates a legitimate real estate development business and attends classes in economics. After Stringer's climactic demise at the end of season three, viewers glimpse the inside of Stringer Bell's abode as Detective McNulty pulls a copy of Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* from a bookshelf in a spotless, modern, white-carpeted apartment.

In the first example, the younger corner boy Wallace, played by Michael B. Jordan, mentioned earlier in the chess scene example, places a monitored phone call to alert Stringer Bell of the whereabouts of a hunted prospect, the boyfriend of Omar Little. The second example features the stark aftermath of Wallace's reactions upon learning the impact of his action the night before. The third example turns the tables and it is now Stringer Bell's partner Avon who is "just doing business" as he says good-bye to his longtime friend and partner; the usually clever Stringer Bell goes through the motions, not recognizing that the rules have changed.

### **First Example—Wallace Makes a Call**

A seemingly innocent call made in the thrill of the hunt resulted in catastrophic torture for a young man who was the partner of Omar Little. In the next example, Wallace spots the object of desire playing pinball and laughing, surrounded by friends. Without thinking through the implications of his actions, but instead only doing what he has been asked to do, he places a phone call to

his crew chief who relays the message up the ladder. At each stage of the discussion, participants forget that they are hunting a human subject upon which to inflict harm, and instead it is simply a matter of following orders.

**“The Pager,” Season 1, Episode 5, 54:23, (Simon, 2011).**

WALLACE CALLS D’ANGELO AND TELLS HIM THAT BRANDON IS THERE. D’ANGELO HANGS UP THE PHONE LOOKS DOWN AND PAUSES BEFORE PLACING HIS NEXT CALL. AFTER RECEIVING A PAGER NOTIFICATION OF URGENCY, STRINGER CALLS D’ANGELO BACK.

STRINGER

What's up, what do you need?

D’ANGELO

My people are onto one of Omar's boys down at  
Greek's.

Remember the phrase, “my people” in the examples of Omar’s speech from theme two: a changing notion of truth in both “Sunday Morning Truce,” and “Nobody, No Victim.” Using the phrase “my people” indicates owing of responsibility for his group. D’Angelo will voice again the developing responsibility he feels by the end of season one by asking a critical question, “Where’s Wallace?” prior to his own prison sentence.

STRINGER

Oh word? All right, sit tight. I'm gonna take care of it.

D’ANGELO

A’ight.

CAMERA MOVES TO SHOW THE ENTIRE CONVERSATION BEING RECORDED. THE TIME ON THE CLOCK IS 20:05. NO ONE IS MONITORING THE COMPUTERS. THE DURATION OF THE CALL IS 17 SECONDS.

POOT  
Ain't nobody coming.

WALLACE  
[NERVOUSLY]  
Yo, Dee said wait. Dee said wait.

CAMERA SHOWS D'ANGELO WAITING BESIDE PAYPHONE AGAINST BRICK WALL OF LOW-RISE. THE VERIZON PAY PHONE IS WELL LIT, BUT D'ANGELO IS ALMOST A SHADOW, THOUGH HE SEEMS TO BE ALMOST WRINGING HIS HANDS AS IF THEY'RE COLD. HE SIGHS AND IS LOOKING OFF IN ONE DIRECTION, AWAY FROM THE PHONE.

CAMERA SHOWS TWO SUVS PULLING UP TO THE CURB. THE SECOND VEHICLE IS A BLACK MERCEDES SUV.

WALLACE  
[SMILING] Told you.

CORNER BOYS WALLACE AND POOT WALK OVER TO THE SECOND SUV. STRINGER BELL IS SITTING IN THE PASSENGER SEAT THIS TIME. WEE-BAY BRICE IS DRIVING.

STRINGER  
Yo, he still in there?

WALLACE  
[BROW FURROWED] Yeah, he in there playing the games.

STRINGER  
A'ight. You sharp, son. What's your name?

WALLACE  
Wallace.

STRINGER  
Wallace? A'ight.



STRINGER  
[TURNS AROUND IN CAR SEAT TO SPEAK TO FOLKS BEHIND HIM.]  
This nigger's gonna point him out to us, a'ight?

CAMERA SHOWS WEE-BAY'S HAND OPENING A PAIR OF HAND CUFFS

CAMERA CUTS TO D'ANGELO SITTING WAITING BY THE PAY PHONE.  
PHONE RINGS.

D'ANGELO  
[ANSWERS]Yeah.

STRINGER  
[voice only]Yo, it's done. Nice work, cuz.

D'ANGELO  
A'ight.

SLOWLY HANGS UP PAY PHONE, PAUSING BEFORE PUTTING DOWN THE  
RECEIVER. WALKS AWAY BROW FURROWED.

CAMERA SWITCHES BACK TO COMPUTER STATION SHOWING  
INCOMING CALLS. THE TIME ON THE STATION IS 20:42. THE DURATION  
OF THE CALL IS 7 SECONDS.

[END SCENE.]

The thoughtless actions that led to the brutal beating, torturing, and taking of a human life took up a total of thirty-seven minutes. Arendt's new type of criminal that she specifically assigns to the bureaucracy heralded during the twentieth century, one that simply follows orders without regard to impact on human life (1963), is illustrated in this example. "A non-ideological, entirely more prosaic combination of careerism and obedience," (Marshall, 2013). Sadly this chain of events initiated by a child, who should have been protected from and not

implicated in the thoughtlessness of human indifference, was yet another thoughtless act. Purpel's answer is to voice outrage in the unimaginable and horrific human suffering in the world wrought by human hands, "and his goal is to quicken the same outrage in the reader," (1999, p. 255) that it not go unnoticed. Simon's outrage at the indifference to human life is staged in digitized color and diagetic sound, the unimaginable visibly splayed across the hood of a car. The next section discusses the impact when Wallace is faced with the bludgeoned body and realizes the part he played. Simon departs from episodic procedural police drama by incorporating the component of moral imagination through the character of Wallace.

### **Second Example—Bodie Agrees to Shoot His Friend**

The next morning Wallace joins a group of onlookers staring at the grotesque site of a beaten and burned man splayed across the large hood of an abandoned sedan. Wallace knows he owns partial responsibility for the crime and over several episodes begins to realize the effects of the business in which he is serving. The scene in which Wallace voices outrage is discussed in chapter four. When Wallace disappears for a few days then resurfaces, drug operations boss Stringer Bell moves to tie up this loose end. In the following scene, Bodie does not question the absurdity of Bell's request to kill his friend, and is eager to please his boss. Thoughtlessness and indifference actions treat people as abstractions, interested in the mechanics of getting the job done.

“The game is the game,” (Simon, 2011); the procedural manner with which Bodie accepts the task of murdering Wallace epitomizes the devaluation of human life. The unseen tragedy is that Bodie is simply performing his job without question.

**“Cleaning Up,” Season 1, Episode 12, 25:33, (Simon, 2011).**

INTRO—BODIE WALKING DOWN CROWDED SIDEWALK, STREET NOISE, TALKING, CHILDREN PLAYING. STOPS TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE, SEES STRINGER’S BLACK SUV AND WALKS OVER.

STRINGER  
[MOVES HEAD SLIGHTLY TO INDICATE THAT  
BODIE SHOULD GET IN BACK BESIDE HIM]  
What up, man?

BODIE  
Same old, same old.

STRINGER  
What's up with that boy?

Cutting to the chase, Stinger Bell does not use a name; the name is common knowledge by now. He is pointing out what he wants done here at this spot simply by bringing up the subject. In the second line Bodie indicates that D’angleo Barksdale gave Wallace his job back, and put him in charge of the money.

BODIE  
Oh man. He's just a punk, that's all.  
Dee put him back on count though.

STRINGER

Oh, word? I heard he was out the game.

BODIE

He was, but he back now.

STRINGER

Where he been at?

BODIE

Down his granny house, he says.

STRINGER

Right, his granny house. I heard he damn near shit his pants when he saw what happened to Omar's bitch.

Here, Stringer Bell is identifying a weakness in the organization that must be dealt with to shore up the business. The weakness is caring about the effects of actions. He identifies utilizing moral imagination as a weakness.

BODIE

He just ain't built for this, you know. His heart pump  
Kool-Aid.

STRINGER

Right. What about you? You built for this shit?

BODIE

No doubt.

[THE TWO STARE EYE-TO-EYE NODDING]

STRINGER

You ready to put the work in?

Stringer Bell is asking Bodie to execute his friend Wallace; it seems almost a test of loyalty and endurance.

BODIE  
[NODS SLOWLY IN AFFIRMATION]

STRINGER  
You got heat? [LOOKS AWAY]

BODIE  
[MOTIONS TO HIS PANTS AND WE HERE HIM TAP  
A GUN THROUGH HIS CLOTHES]

At this point there is no questioning in Bodie's words or facial expression of Stringer's request. There is no recognition that this boy is a close friend of Bodie's. This execution is just business and both see it as such.

STRINGER  
[SLIGHT SMILE, NODS AND LOOKS AWAY] All  
right, soldier.

BODIE GETS OUT OF CAR AND WALKS AWAY, LOOKING OVER HIS  
SHOULDER. STRINGER WATCHES.

[END SCENE.]

Bodie has every intent of shooting Wallace when he leaves Stringer Bell's car. For Bodie, a soldier does not question orders. Banality and thoughtlessness push out the space where moral imagination might be wielded instead. Greene says that it takes a conscious effort to imagine that there are alternatives, that possibilities exist, and "openings through which [to] move," (1995, p.14). When it comes to actually finishing the murder, Bodie is unable to follow through after firing one shot and looking into the eyes of his friend. The truth of Bodie's lived

experience changes in this instant, as he begins to question his role as soldier. Bodie's thoughtless unquestioned response to authority resulted in the death of his friend.

### **Third Example—The Balcony Scene**

Two men, close as brothers, plot to seal the others fate; business is out of control, and each blames the other for perceived failures. Suddenly, the banality of the phrase "it's just business," carries new meaning for Stringer Bell and Avon Barksdale, the chess King and "Queen" of the Barksdale drug ring. The night before, Stringer, always planning, always scheming, contacts former Baltimore police Major Bunny Colvin, played by Robert Wisdom, and colludes to provide information that will send his friend Avon up for another five to seven years in the state penitentiary. Avon learns from a colleague that his friend Stringer worked behind his back to undermine his authority. When he has to choose between a New York supply line of drugs or going out of business to save his long-time friend, he chooses the former. The banal bureaucracy in this case indeed comes from Avon Barksdale, but also from Stringer Bell—who so used to playing games with peoples lives, refuses to recognize the thoughtlessness directed toward his own.

The sublime beauty of the next scene is revealed as the characters switch roles, each man espousing the other's worst qualities. Avon Barksdale now utters the phrase "It's just business," much to the surprise of his childhood

friend Stinger Bell. And Stringer is blind to the notion of a changing set of game rules taking Avon's unending loyalty for granted while he dreams of what could have been. Neither character knows what the other has done, and neither suspects the other of acting in any direction other than support and goodwill.

**"Middle Ground," Season 3, Episode 11, 45:23 (Simon, 2011).**

BELL AND BARKSDALE ARE STANDING ON THE BALCONY OF THE NEW APARTMENT STRINGER PURCHASED FOR AVON WITH PROCEEDS FROM HIS REAL ESTATE BUSINESS. THEY EACH HAVE A DRINK IN HAND. THEY ARE CASUAL YET GUARDED IN THEIR SPEECH. RECENTLY THEIR DISCUSSIONS HAVE BEEN OVERLY HEATED, AND THIS TALK IS IN DIRECT CONTRAST TO THE EMOTIONAL ANGST AND FRUSTRATION EACH HAS DEVELOPED TOWARD THE OTHER.

STRINGER

Damn, man, I miss this crib already.

AVON

Yeah, well, you spending a lot of time at the other spot doing what you gotta do.

STRINGER

Yeah. Man, it's a shame we got to deal with this Marlo bullshit, man. I mean, if I had taken care of that earlier, man.

AVON

There's always gonna be a Marlo, man. No Marlo, no game. But you could've dealt with that shit a little sooner, I mean, yeah, but, you know what I'm saying? Don't let it lay on you like that. Tonight, I mean, I'm gonna kick back and just enjoy this view. I mean, look at this shit. Can you fucking believe this? I mean, I got a crib that's overlooking the Harbor. This is the same place we used to run through this motherfucker, we had every security guard in there following us.

Here, Avon stops himself from complaining about the sticky situation they're in because of Stringer's lack of attacking the problem. Instead, he focuses on the task at hand, which is saying goodbye.

STRINGER  
As they should have.

AVON  
True, true. And then there was that one time

STRINGER  
Toy store?

They are connecting through shared histories of childhood events. Each has supported the other through good times and bad. Stringer has always covered Avon's back, whether in the service of business or not is open to question. During the snitch to Major Colvin just the night before, Stringer does show concern that Avon not go back to jail for too long, just long enough for Stringer to get his drug co-op going again on his terms.

AVON  
Hell, yeah, I told your ass not to steal the badminton set. What you gonna do with a fucking net [STRINGER LAUGHING] and a racket and we ain't got no yard!

STRINGER  
[LAUGHING, LOOKS OUT OVER HARBOR]

AVON  
You like, 'Yo, that white boy ain't gonna jump over that counter and come chase after me.'



STRINGER  
He sure did, though.

AVON  
Then he said Woosh

STRINGER  
I said, "What the fuck?"

AVON  
He was on your ass like Carl Lewis, fists was rolled up  
[SIMULATES A RUNNER] Your ass was running, too, fast as you  
could. Punching yourself in the chest looking all mad and shit. That  
shit was crazy man.

STRINGER  
Right here, too, man, right there. Goddamn. Can you imagine, man,  
if I had the money that I have now, man I could have bought half  
this waterfront property. God damn it.

AVON  
Eh, forget about that for a while, man. You know, just dream with  
me.

Avon knows that Stringer's death is imminent and wants to ignore it for a while;  
however, he still holds the power to end it. He could easily have supplied  
Stringer with back-up, he could have filled Stringer in on the plan, or could have  
made sure Stringer was armed. Avon and Stringer have more money than  
either could spend; Stringer's real-estate business is legitimate. Avon uses the  
line of "It's just business" to justify his actions.

STRINGER  
[STARING AT AVON, STREET NOISE IN THE BACKGROUND]  
We ain't gotta dream no more, man. We got real shit. Real estate,  
we can touch. [BOTH PAUSE] I can't get too fucked up tonight  
man. I got some shit I gotta do on the site tomorrow. Plus, the

fucking Polack we got working for us, man, I gotta pull his coat. If he had anything to do with that Clay Davis bullshit, man I'm gonna have to cut his money, little faggot.

AVON

What time y'all meeting?

STRINGER

Uh, what time? Uh 12, I think. Why? You need me to do something for you?

Stringer notices the unusual interest his partner Avon has in his whereabouts; until now Avon has remained aloof. He has not joined the drug cooperative business meetings, and although providing funds, he has not actively joined in the real-estate projects. In one heated exchange Avon told Stringer he was a man without a country and that he probably bled green.

AVON

(looking straight ahead, listening, nodding. Camera is close in; his head takes up half the screen) [relaxes then] No, I'm just seeing where you going to be at. You need to relax more, man.

STRINGER

Well, when the time is right, I will. You know, I don't take my work too seriously.

AVON

[SNIFFS QUICKLY] That's right. [NODDING]  
It's just business.

Avon has to tell himself it is nothing more than a business arrangement to deal with the painful situation of complying with the planned murder of Stringer.

Though Avon often utters the phrase, 'the game is the game,' he has never used the phrase "It's just business." This is the only spot in the entire series in which he utters this phrase. This example illustrates the complexities that accompany a discussion of the tool of moral imagination through banality and thoughtlessness because it can be approached from at least two points of view, that of Stringer Bell and partner Avon Barksdale, and multiple interpretations from viewers. I suspect that viewers do not blame Avon Barksdale; Stringer Bell had it coming as they say. I also suspect they did not believe that the series creators would really go through with writing off such a manipulative charismatic immoral character and are as surprised as Stringer Bell when it really happens.

STRINGER  
[LOOKS AT AVON BRIEFLY, QUESTIONING]

AVON  
[BRINGS HIS FIST UP GESTURING FOR A FIST POUND WHICH LEADS TO  
SOME SORT OF SECRET HANDSHAKE, AND THEN A HUG]  
To us.

STRINGER  
To us, man [LOOKS OUT BEYOND THE CAMERA, CLOSE UP OF  
STAINLESS ROLEX, THEN WALKS OFF]

AVON  
[REMAINS BEHIND, WATCHING HIM LEAVE. BREATHES DEEPLY,  
HOLDING ROCKS GLASS AND JUST STARING.]

[END SCENE].

Greene describes a “gap between what we are living through in our present and what survives from our past,” (1995, p.21) as inevitable to assimilating connections particularly with the tool of moral imagination. Not paying attention results in missed connections and thoughtless actions. The interest in the real estate project alone should have tipped Stringer off to the illicit plans of his partner, but his goal-orientated behavior around business profits let the clues slip by him and he is caught completely off guard, “not packing,” when he is gunned down. Stringer Bell, after using people as means for three seasons, became the abstraction, an obstacle in the way of operating the business.

The themes of banality and thoughtlessness, a changing notion of truth, and the idea that all people matter covered in the pages of this chapter lay a foundation for themes covered in chapter four: seeing beyond the taken for granted; asking critical questions; and people claiming responsibility. The tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice is used by philosophers Greene and Purpel to take to task practices that go unheeded, and to urge people to pay more attention to dominant ideologies in the world around them.

Simon’s notion of two Americas is examined more closely along this line of inquiry as the income inequality and disparity of living conditions has created two separate societies in the lived experience of people living in the United States in the year 2014. We are encouraged through the writings of Purpel,

Greene and Dewey not to separate ourselves one from the other, lest we lose our democracy's fervor. The next chapter also discusses the expansion of market values into "spheres of life where they don't belong," (Sandel, 2012) drawing even more attention to the disparities. The examples that accompany the themes in each section will involve some of the same situations and characters already presented in this chapter as well as introduce new roles and developments, and will help to flesh out and more aptly illustrate a definition of moral imagination as a tool utilized to value and defend the rights of people to live without oppression, that champions the lives of all, and that works in community to secure justice for everyone.

## CHAPTER IV

### CLAIMING RESPONSIBILITY

Our ideas and stories are the blueprints for our future. Of course, ideas and stories don't arise in a vacuum. They come out of particular times and places, (Riane Eisler, 2007, p.139).

My faith is that this mysterious impulse to make the world better will continue to energize our hopes and vision, (David Purpel, 1999, p.8).

There must be a confronting of the contradictions, the instances of savagery, the neglect, and the possibility of care, (Greene, 1993, p.220).

This chapter continues an analysis of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice through themes found in *The Wire* across multiple seasons, episodes, settings, and characters. In the preceding chapter, themes discussed through textual analysis of specific examples drawn from the series were: recognizing that all people matter and that the experience of each person matters to the larger whole; a changing notion of truth—acknowledging a concept of truth that varies from person to person; and the consequences of banality and thoughtlessness—discussing the impact of individual actions void of introspection. There are four additional themes presented and examined in

this chapter: Seeing beyond the taken for granted and journeying in a state of wideawakeness; seeking new paths and breaking through dominant ideologies of power and control through asking critical questions; and people claiming responsibility for and valuing the lives of others. The six themes presented in this dissertation that support a definition of moral imagination in the service of social justice are, in this order:

1. Everybody matters
2. A changing notion of truth
3. Banality and thoughtlessness
4. Seeing beyond the taken for granted
5. Asking critical questions
6. People claiming responsibility

As in the previous chapter, each theme includes three to four examples from across five seasons of Simon's televised serial *The Wire*; the examples are not in chronological order. This chapter discusses themes four, five and six.

#### **Theme Four: Seeing Beyond the Taken for Granted**

Purpel says the surest path to defeat and cynicism is "lack of humanity: a lack of recognition of indeed how limited we are and how much there is to do," (1999, p.257) to end oppression for all human beings. Taking things for granted, Greene admonishes, not seeing with eyes wide-awake creates opportunities for

human suffering to go unheeded and unnoticed. She urges us to seek opportunities “to overcome the taken-for-granted and the routine,” (1995, p.36) in the everyday. Dewey also warns against stasis and urges us instead to be in a state of choosing that requires thoughtful deliberate examination of surroundings and situations, describing himself as a wanderer through life, (Giarelli, 2007, p.1).

The idea of taking things for granted takes on a new personality in a market society where it seems everything is up for sale, including services formerly relegated to civic life. The idea that we can use money to buy just about anything leaves those groups of people without extra money to spend at a disadvantage. With an acknowledged and widening gap between the poor in this country and the wealthy, large groups of people lack income or influence to affect the markets in which they are forced to live. Sandel positions the argument this way:

The uses of markets to allocate health, education, public safety, national security, criminal justice, environmental protection, recreation, procreation, and other social goods were for the most part unheard of thirty years ago. Today, we take them largely for granted, (2012, p.8).

People often take the familiarity of their surroundings for granted. Leaving familiarity of community intervenes in thoughtlessness, and opens the door for critical thinking. Going outside of the familiar wakes the senses. The



City of Baltimore was not a safe haven for characters in *The Wire*, but it was very familiar and characters often took that familiarity for granted. Early on, the young corner teen Preston “Bodie” Broadus, played by J.D. Williams, wonders aloud as he travels north to Philadelphia, “Why would anyone would ever want to leave Baltimore?” (Simon, 2011). People find safety in people, places, processes, and things they are used to being around. In *The Wire*, one might argue that even the notion of safety was up for sale. I thought about this as I drove past blocks and blocks of boarded up row houses where I also saw children playing. Not having money to move to a different neighborhood puts a family’s safety within a market economy. I heard this same sentiment one afternoon in conversation with a woman named Paula, born and raised in the city of Baltimore. She told me there was a lot of crime in her neighborhood, gesturing toward the empty lots in front of us that were recently cleared of vacant housing due to neglect. According to Google maps, we were standing only a seven-minute walk from the intersection where Detective Jimmy McNulty questioned a witness after a street kid named Snot Boogie was found dead in the opening scene of the season one; she pointed toward a direction where she thought *The Wire* was filmed, and mentioned she had not lived in the neighborhood during the series filming.

Waiting in a slow-moving line to tour the recently renovated Edgar Allen Poe House across the street from an empty lot that was occupied the year

before by a corner store and boarded up row-houses, I continued talking with Paula for the hour and a half that we waited in line. She said she had lived in the neighborhood for about two years but had never been in the historical house before. (It had only recently reopened and this was the last weekend before it closed for the winter months.) “Black people don’t study history,” was her disparaging comment to me when people continually asked her what was going on each time they passed us. Her twenty-three year old daughter came by to talk to her, and also brought her a cigarette—running to their home and back to us in just under two minutes. We talked about our children and she told me she was worried that her daughter smoked too much weed.

I asked Paula if she was from Baltimore and she said, “Born and raised,” almost as a badge of honor. Her speech was crisp and clear, pronouncing each syllable of Bal-ti-more instead of the drawled out BALL-tuh-mer that I often heard people say. I asked her if she thought she would ever leave the city and she said she didn’t think she would. We talked a bit about the possibility of a less expensive life style in North Carolina, and I pointed out that it was usually cheaper in rural areas but that then you had to deal with the lack of public transportation. She said she hoped by the time her baby granddaughter was older that “things would clean up in her neighborhood,” because it was drug-infested and full of crime. She was my age, late forties.

The docent at the door to the Edgar Allen Poe home watched us as our line moved slowly toward the entrance. Paula's physical frame was excruciatingly thin—the skin across her cheekbones pulled so tight that there was not a chance of a wrinkle forming anywhere. She seemed proud that she knew who Edgar Allen Poe was, explaining that she learned about him in school. She was probably the only person from the neighborhood standing in our line of fifty or so.

A Baltimore City Police car sat across from this snail-paced line of tourists and one neighborhood resident, watching the line of visitors move slowly toward the entrance. What a sight we must have been: A queue of “whities,” as Paula referred to us—“all y'all whities”—standing in the middle of her neighborhood, waiting patiently to visit the home of the grandfather of horror and detective fiction. She asked me several times why I was there. I think she was asking me what I saw that she might be taking for granted; was there something else around she had not noticed? I told her I was writing a paper for school.

When interviewed on the subject matter of the fourth season surrounding the massive systemic failures of the education system, Simon explains,

Finally Ed [Burns] made a very impassioned argument that we need to speak to where the Bodies and the Wallaces and the Stringers and the Avons all came from....We pretend we're educating them for our world, but again there's a fraud there, and Ed experienced it in his seven years as a teacher.

The subtext of the storyline during the entirety of season four is voiced by one character when he follows up on Simon's statement that schooling educates these students for a world they do not know or experience. In a culture where access to a holistic, well-rounded education is commodified, the gap between the rich and the poor makes money matter more and more, (Sandel, 2012). The next examples depict two different views of middle school students in season four. The first example covers an eighth grade teachers' meeting where teachers urge the new guy, former police officer turned first-year math teacher Roland Prysbylewski, played by Jim True-Frost, not to expect too much, brilliantly illustrating Purpel's complaint that the teaching profession has "fashioned a pedagogy of control and standardization," (1999, p.188) instead of one that educates holistically and with fresh eyes. In the second example another former police officer, Bunny Colvin, played by Robert Wisdom, chastises school administrators for expecting too little. They do not acknowledge "the great importance of imaginative thinking about alternative social arrangement and possibilities of things being otherwise," (Greene, 1995, p.34).

The third example I've chosen to illustrate the concept of taken-for-granted switches gears and revisits the character of D'Angelo Barksdale as he instructs his corner crew to value even the drug fiends as human beings, using the tool of moral imagination to see beyond a washed-up drug fiend to the human being inside, illustrating Dewey's use of moral imagination "to concretely

perceive what is before us in light of what could be,” (Fesmire, 2003, p.65) and to underscore the point that all people matter.

### **First Example—Soft Eyes**

Continually making egregious life and death errors in his role as police detective, Officer Roland Prysbylewski finally trades in his badge for an eighth-grade math classroom. The camera first shows him in the classroom chiseling gum off the bottoms of desks with a hammer and screwdriver listening to Johnny Cash sing, “I fell in to a burning ring of fire,” (Carter & Kilgore, 1963) as he works deliberately to get his classroom cleaned up and organized. Though not an autobiographical characterization, series co-creator Ed Burns followed the same path as a Baltimore City Schools math teacher after retiring from his police career. The next example depicts a teachers’ meeting attended by five teachers the day before the students come back from summer break. An older teacher advises Roland Prysbylewski not to try too hard, “You need soft eyes,” (Simon, 2011) she says, just gloss over the things that trouble you.

Soft eyes, and taking things for granted, keep details out of focus and ensure that dominant ideologies go unchecked. Think back to black and white headshots of mid-century starlets, each in soft focus with fuzzy borders around their faces and smiles with not an imperfection to be found. When this teacher says “soft eyes,” she’s asking him to soften his focus, to not worry about the imperfections or things that need to be improved and changed. Purpel

vehemently urges us to do just the opposite and to look with fresh eyes. He says a holistic education requires, “all human energies—the mind, the intellect, the body, the soul...[through] our history and our traditions of knowing seek to benefit from accumulated knowledge and wisdom,” (1999, p.130). Prysbylewski knows that chewing gum is just the tip of the iceberg, but if he can’t get the students to stop chewing gum in class what else is he going to have to gloss over?

Greene reminds that students should be continually challenged and engaged, instead of “simply passive receivers of predigested information,” (1995, p. 34). Using soft eyes, not focusing on the individual potential of each child and glossing over their uniqueness, teachers cannot connect with students as human beings and explore “possibilities of things being otherwise,” (1995, p.34). Faced with a market culture of improved test scores and assessments, the role of today’s teacher has devolved into a commodities manager, where the product is not the child’s educational journey, but a numerical representation as substitution for actual learning. Teachers in American society have to produce test scores to keep their jobs and get raises; “when money governs access to the good life...inequality matters a great deal, and so, the marketization of everything sharpens the sting of inequality and its social and civic consequence,” (Sandel, 2013). When non-market values change the meaning of the goods being exchanged, something suffers. The notion of education in

America, and that same notion mirrored in *The Wire*, is indeed suffering. The monetary incentives illustrated here and throughout examples in the series crowd out “intrinsic motivations and non-market values worth caring about, especially teaching and learning,” (Sandel, 2013).

**“Soft eyes,” Season 4, Episode 2, 46:01 (Simon, 2011).**

TEACHERS LOUNGE. LEAD TEACHER GRACE SAMPSON, PRYSBYLEWSKI, AND MS. SHAPIRO AT THE TABLE. TWO OTHER TEACHERS ARE ON THE ADJACENT COUCH. THE OLDER OF THE TWO IS NOT PARTICIPATING IN THE CONVERSATION BUT RATHER LEAFING THROUGH A MAGAZINE.

GRACE SAMPSON

Next order of business, class rules. It helps if the team is in agreement on these. Less wiggle room for the children. Mrs. Scott?

MRS. SCOTT

Same as last year, double space. Language Arts, we grade a lot of papers. It doesn't make them write any better, but it saves my eyesight.

MRS. SHAPIRO

Make sure you demonstrate it for them. Some of them think double-space means more space between words.

PRYSBYLEWSKI

I'd have thought by eighth grade --

GRACE SAMPSON

Rule of thumb around here, Mr. Prysbylewski, never assume. Explain what you want them to do, have them do it, then explain again. With time and patience, they'll get it. Mrs. Shapiro?

MRS. SHAPIRO

It's easier to keep track of lab work if we all use the same heading.

GRACE SAMPSON

Upper right-hand corner, above the first blue line: name, date, and class number, in that order? (nods head towards Mrs. Shapiro) Mr. Prysbylewski, do you have anything you want addressed?

Shaped by the surroundings, the eighth grade teaching team creates a set of classroom management rules, none of which add to Purpel's holistic pedagogy (1999, p.3, 1989, p.124), but instead are meant to literally dull the senses of students and to keep them in line. Something as simple as asking them not to smack gum in class is seen as an unfeasible request.

PRYSBYLEWSKI

Can we have them not chew gum?  
[GROUP OF TEACHERS CHUCKLES.]

MRS. SHAPIRO

They won't do it in Ms. Sampson's class, but in four years, I have not been able to stop them.

GRACE SAMPSON

You can try, but first year, it's best to stick with basics. And team rules -- we can only go with what we can all enforce.

MRS. SCOTT

Also, keep your windows closed. Makes them drowsy, and drowsy's good.



MRS. SCOTT GETS UP TO LEAVE, THE CAMERA  
SHOWS MS. SHAPIRO EXITING ROOM.  
PRYSBYLEWSKI STILL WANTS TO TALK.

GRACE SAMPSON

There's a lot to learn. But for now, build in lots of  
activities in your lesson plan. You can't have enough.  
You keep them busy, you keep them off-guard.

OLDER TEACHER

[HAS BEEN SILENT THROUGHOUT MEETING, APPROACHES  
PREZBO] You need *soft* eyes.

[THEN SHE FOLLOWS OTHERS OUT OF THE ROOM.]

PRYSBYLEWSKI

[STILL SITTING AT TABLE, FIDDLING WITH PEN,  
LOOKS PERPLEXED]  
Excuse me?

This older nameless and perhaps more experienced teacher uses a coping skill of looking at students with soft eyes. What she implies is not to look too hard, not to delineate or to be too specific, to overlook the flaws. She is giving Prysbylewski advice to help him merely get through his day and with that advice glosses over the dominant ideologies of improving test scores, instead of helping him to figure out how to connect with his students. She is not asking him to be wide-awake, but instead to not linger too long or expect too much. She wants him to play the game, which is the business of schooling, assessment, and test scores. Writing about the need for children to connect with their teachers Greene writes,

The caring teacher tries to look through students' eyes, to struggle with them as subjects in search of their own projects, their own ways of making sense of the world...it is to interpret from as many vantage points as possible lived experience, the ways there are of being in the world, (1995, p.120).

By using the tool of moral imagination, Prysbylewski looks at the unique attributes each student brings to their learning and finds hope in the smallest of achievements. Throughout season four, he looks for multiple ways to make math interesting—he raids the back closets, he listens to what students say, and he develops relationships with the students that help to foster creative outputs. In contrast to his role as street cop, Prysbylewski develops a very sharp focus for detail in the classroom and practices wide-awakeness in his role as teacher and mentor.

### **Second Example—Bunny Colvin and the University Professor**

In the next excerpt, retired Major “Bunny” Colvin, played by Robert Wisdom, tells school administrators that they are not expecting enough from their students; to treat them as other students not only sets them up for failure, but sets the rest of the class up for hardship as well. Administrators take for granted that the students will fail their classes. Bunny Colvin sees the students with a fresh set of eyes. He listens to what they say, and he watches what they do. He patiently sculpts a new definition of success for this group of corner kids by expecting more instead of taking for granted that they are going to give him

less. Colvin's position toward teaching the students illustrates Greene's approach to education; he is meeting the students where they are, not where he wants them to be. She writes,

We can hope to communicate the recognition that persons become more fully themselves and open to the world if they can be aware of themselves appearing before others, speaking in their own voices, and trying as they do so to bring into being a common world, (1995, p.68).

The next example depicts a discussion between the university researcher and Colvin, who both recognize this context, and school administrators who do not.

SUPERINTENDENT

You took them to a restaurant?

COLVIN

Ruth's Chris, silverware, more than one fork [LAUGHS]

SUPERINTENDENT

How'd they do?

COLVIN

Well, pretty well considering

SUPERINTENDENT

Did they embarrass us?

COLVIN

Us, no. We're fine with it, but uh, I mean they were intimidated and embarrassed and awkward as hell but they made it through

RESEARCHER

Ms. Shephardson, these aren't the kids that are going to be able to sit still for the statewide tests. Much less do well on them. These are the kids that were going to make it impossible for anyone else to do well.

SUPERINTENDENT

So we're writing them off?

COLVIN

No that's not what we're doing.

SUPERINTENDENT

You're not educating them, you're socializing them.

RESEARCHER

They weren't being educated before, there's no point in being obtuse.

SUPERINTENDENT

Excuse me?

COLVIN

Hold on, hold on. Look, what he's saying is this. You put a textbook in front of these kids, put a problem on a blackboard, or teach them some problem on a statewide test it won't matter. None of it. Cause they not learning from our world, they learning from theirs. And they know exactly what it is they training for, and exactly what it is everyone expects them to be.

In season four it is clear that some teachers and administrators at Tilman Middle School have written off these children. But consider that "low self-esteem and other's perceptions of their abilities [may be] holding them back," (Stephens, 2014). After a knife attack in the classroom by warring students, no respect for school authority, and students regularly skipping class heading to the corners to

sell drugs, Bunny Colvin explains, “The whole damn school is training for the streets,” (Simon, 2011). The corner is what they know.

In another classroom scene at Tilman Middle School, a teachers asks, “Where do you see yourself in ten years? How many of you wrote down dead?” Stop and think about that statement for a minute. Namond Brice, played by Julito McCollum, raising his hand grinning and nodding at the amount of hands raised in the room answers her, “Shit, you saw that coming,” (Simon, 2011).

SUPERINTENDENT

I expect them to be students.

COLVIN

But it’s not about you or us, or the test or the system, it’s what they expect of themselves. I mean every single one of them know they heading back to the corners. Their brothers and sisters, shit their parents. They came through these same classrooms didn’t they? We pretended to teach them, they pretended to learn and where they end up? Same damn corners. I mean, they not fools these kids. They don’t know our world but they know they own. I mean, Jesus, they see right through us.

RESEARCHER

I think we made that clear when you approved the project.

SUPERINTENDENT

Provisionally approved it

RESEARCHER

Would you provisionally approved the project had we made it clear that we would be addressing children that required socialization before they could be properly educated?

COLVIN  
We can't lie. (GAZING AT SUPERINTENDENT  
WHO IS GAZING BACK) Not to them.

[END SCENE.]

Being interviewed about groundbreaking moments from *The Wire*, African-American author and filmmaker Nelson George discusses the addition of the education component saying,

That takes a show about bad guys and good guys and gives it a whole other level of responsibility...It's about the loss of their childhoods, and it reflects the loss of childhood for thousands of American children, (2007).

Receiving multiple awards and accolades for his work depicting culturally-based insights into the darker side of human choices, North Carolina-based screenwriter and playwright Angus Maclachlan adds,

Over and over, like all good storytelling, *The Wire* makes you see why these people do what they do. Even when what they do is destructive, self destructive, and/or reprehensible. It is a game that is rigged, and horrible, and yet so human, (personal correspondence, 2014).

At the end of season four, former police major Bunny Colvin fosters one of the corner boys he worked with during the research, Namond Brice. It is one of a very few happy-ending instances for this group of youngsters. The discussion where Bunny Colvin travels to the state penitentiary and asks Namond's father

for guardianship of Namond is covered in theme six of this discussion, people claiming responsibility.

### **Third Example—Drug Fiends Are People Too**

The varying hues of identity within the community of drug soldiers found within *The Wire* often contradicts the dominant ideology of just doing business. Dewey's social construct of self and changing notion of truth depicts individuals defined by their relationships to other people as well as institutions (Dewey, 1984); the actions of individuals within *The Wire* is not identical, nor is their experience. For example, within the prison lives are physically confined yet in some instances their place in the outside world's social hierarchy often remains intact. The storyline shows the incarcerated drug kingpin, Avon Barksdale, played by Wood Harris, still calling the shots from inside prison walls. Likewise, other characters in *The Wire* are not without agency though confined within the prison-like boundaries of the game. They begin to utilize moral imagination in the service of social justice to question how their actions affect circumstances and the people around them. A character may show remorse at the taking of a life, but also knows that within the game the rule is to shoot or be shot. Tracing resistance to the way things are experienced through questioning particular situation of self as a member of community, Foucault's notions of power and discipline are also mapped into *The Wire*, (Kelleter, 2012, p.52) alongside the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice.

The move to resituate self in relationship to other people, to change one's circumstances, requires recognition that other people have a fundamental right to live without oppression, and activates a process that incorporates the tool of moral imagination in consideration of eliminating harm to others. This is illustrated in the following scene as crew boss D'Angelo Barksdale questions the inhumane treatment of drug addicts by Bodie and Wallace; in doing so uses the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice to instruct his young crew to support human dignity, even in the absurd situation of handing out drugs to the addicts whose dignity he seeks to uphold. Wallace and Bodie take the drug fiends for granted, their presence is simply the presence of a market without external values. "Markets express and promote certain attitudes toward the goods being exchanged," (Sandel, 2012, p.9). D'Angelo harnesses the tool of moral imagination to value and care about the humanity of each addict. Valuing and caring is a basic lesson not learned by Bodie, and is "particularly urgent to counter the staggering brutality (Eisler, 2007, p.233) encountered in cultural experiences of a market society.

**"The buys," Season 1, Episode 3, 0:01 (Simon, 2011).**

MORNING, PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECT-BODIE AND WALLACE TALKING,  
D'ANGELO APPROACHES THE GROUP.

BODIE  
Yo the shit is late



D'ANGELO

They still vialing up. Usually come off the train street-ready, but this time they gotta vial.

ADDICT

[APPROACHES D'ANGELO]

Y'all got any testers, man?

D'ANGELO

Yeah, later.

ADDICT

Later? [WALK-RUNS TO THE SIDE, BODIE IN HIS SIGHTS]

[TO BODIE] Got any testers man?

BODIE

Nigger, it ain't even 9:00 and you fiending on it. Get the fuck out of here, man. Damn.

BODIE AND WALLACE WALK TO WHERE D'ANGELO IS PERCHED ON AN ELECTRIC BOX; IT'S GRAY AND CLEARLY COLD BECAUSE EVERYONE HAS ON JACKETS AND HATS. THERE ARE NO CLOTHES ON THE CLOTHESLINES.

D'ANGELO

[TO BODIE] Why you act like that?

BODIE

What, for these junkie motherfuckers?

D'ANGELO

So you just gonna take his money all day and treat him like a dog?

BODIE

How I'm supposed to treat him?

D'ANGELO

I don't know [HE IS TOSSING A TENNIS BALL BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN HIS HANDS; WALLACE WATCHES AND LISTENS] But you ain't got to punk him like that.

BODIE

He punked himself. He's a goddamn drug addict.

D'ANGELO

And you a goddamn drug dealer.

D'angelo is looking at this sales relationship situation with eyes wide awake. He does not let Bodie use the point that their discussion concerns the dignity of addicts, essentially telling Bodie that he as a drug dealer is not without guilt in the plight of the addicts. A couple of sentences later he recovers and brings up the point that the police would perhaps stay away if they mistreated fewer people in business dealings, but at heart he is concerned with the state of the addicts because they are human beings, not because he is worried about being caught by the police. His character begins to ask critical questions here as well. This theme is further examined in the next section.

BODIE

So? So what? Oh wait, the customers always right?

WALLACE

We're in the projects. The customer be fucked up. You can't give these niggers shit, man.

D'ANGELO

Why not? Why can't you? Shit, everything else in the world get sold without people taking advantage. Scamming, lying, doing each other dirty. Why it gotta be that way with this?

POOT  
'Cause they DOPE fiends

D'ANGELO  
Yeah, but the game ain't gotta be played like that yo. You can't tell me this shit can't get done without people beating on each other...Killing each other, doing each other like dogs. Without all that you ain't got 5-0 here on our backs every five minutes...throwing us around and shit.

WALLACE  
Shit, man.

D'ANGELO  
You think 5-0 would care about niggers getting high? In the projects?! [LOOKS INCREDULOUS] Man, 5-0 be down here about the bodies. That's what they be down here about the bodies.

BUBBS  
Squires, young squires!

BODIE  
What you want, nigger?

BUBBS  
A little bag of styles, man. A little bag of styles for you. [HE PULLS OUT THE RED BRIMMED HAT, PLACES IT ON HIS HEAD, THEN PLACES IT ON D'ANGELO'S.] Only \$5, what's up with that? \$5 make you a gallant motherfucker, right there boy.

THE CAMERA PANS OUT AND SHOWS GREGGS ON TOP OF A NEARBY ROOF WITH MCNULTY, TAKING PHOTOS OF THE SMALL GROUP. THE BACKDROP OF THE SHE'S PUBLIC ROW HOUSING SHOWS MANY WINDOWS AND DOORS BOARDED UP. NO LEAVES ON TREES. ONE YOUNG HOPPER IS STILL STANDING GUARD OFF TO THE LEFT OF THE GROUP. LOOKING OUT. BUBBS THEN TAKES THE RED HAT FROM D'ANGELO AND PLACES IT ON BODIE.

[END SCENE.]

At the end of the scene, the red hat vibrates against the pallor of the wintery, treeless gray day. On subsequent viewings, I can't help but notice that both people Bubbs identifies to police by placing a red hat on their heads do not survive the series: D'Angelo Barksdale and Preston "Bodie" Brodus, played by African-American actors Lawrence Gilliard Jr., and J.D. Williams respectively. Moral imagination in the service of social justice implores us to ponder difficult questions. The characters of D'Angelo and Bodie advance their use of moral imagination in the course of their character development through having the courage to approach issues from multiple sides, asking critical questions as part of their respective journeys.

### **Theme Five: Asking Critical Questions**

The tool of moral imagination, built upon a foundation that every person matters, a changing notion of truth for each individual, and arguing against thoughtlessness and arguing for wide-awakeness urges us to ask critical questions of what could be, and to "be aware of what each other's role and contribution," (Purpel, 1989, p.122) could be. The role of wide-awakeness for the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice also demands that dominant ideologies are critically questioned.

In the twenty-first century, the amount of poverty in America and other countries also lends a parallel meaning for the term critical: we are indeed a nation in crisis. Asking critical questions—like D'Angelo Barksdale's challenge

of “why not?”—and attacking issues with a sense of urgency rings true for both Purpel and Greene; for them, revealing and breaking apart dominant ideologies of power and control through asking critical questions seeks to chip away at systems and institutions embedded in consumer societies that perpetuate inequalities. When a society decides that “certain goods can be bought and sold, [it] decides, at least implicitly, that it is appropriate to treat them...as instruments of profit and use,” (Sandel, 2012, p.9). Questioning the status quo behind systemic dysfunction opens paths to public discourse. This reflective search for possible solutions to uphold human dignity through public discourse is also held tantamount in Dewey’s notion of democracy, and is essential toward eliminating human oppressions. “We have to reason together in public about the values and meanings behind the social practices we prize,” (Sandel, 2013). Purpel says asking critical questions,

Also involves us in combining rigor with judgment, in attempting to integrate careful thinking with our moral and esthetic principles...to avoid the horrors that come from intellectual skills being used for destructive purposes and the application of principles with more sentimentality than reason, (1989, p.131).

Purpel’s prophetic voice, teaching the skills to make a just world, is “reechoed by John Dewey...in his concept of education as the process by which we can engage and make a world,” (Purpel, 1989, p.125) though the deliberate skill and practice of asking critical questions. “Sometimes we decide to live with

a morally corrosive market practice for the sake of the social good it provides,” (Sandel, 2012, p.162) and then it becomes taken for granted, unchecked, and vulnerable to market values and commodification. Further illustrating a changing notion of truth and the responsibility to seek fresh meanings, Dewey proposes that a line of critical questioning opens the door to other questions!

Every defeat is a stimulus to renewed inquiry; every victory won is the open door to more discoveries, and every discovery is a new seed planted in the soil of intelligence, from which flow fresh plants with new fruits...there is but one sure road of access to truth—the road of patient, cooperative inquiry operating by means of observation, experiment, record and controlled reflection, (1934, p.82).

Greene’s notion of wide-awakeness also speaks to the tool of moral imagination in asking critical questions, to dig deeply and explore critical questions in the service of supporting human dignity and eliminating oppression. In a market society where everything can be bought, inequality becomes all the more important because money provides or denies access to the good life—to better education, better healthcare, and political access (Sandel, 2013). She writes, “A new taken-for-granted attitude in respect to meritocracies, hierarchies, and ladders demands new kinds of critical interpretation, new ways of questioning lived worlds,” 1995, p.51), especially within consumer societies where everything is up for sale. I believe she’s referring to the idea that our institutions and bureaucracies are not checked with the rigor with which they

deserve to be questioned. Greene urges us to question not just from a perspective of 'are these institutions functioning,' but rather one of questioning whether or not these institutions are aiding the human condition and ending oppression or confirming the dominant ideology of consumer culture. Questions like wondering where the money goes, or wondering why someone cares, and being concerned with the state of the lives of drug addicts all support a line of critical questioning in support of social justice and illustrate Purpel's example of denial and rationalization in search for meaning. We want to believe we're doing the right thing. Characters in *The Wire* ask these critical questions throughout the series—each an intellectual challenge to a dominant ideology of some lives do not matter when positioned alongside big business and profit. Three examples of asking critical questions are included in the following pages.

The series also introduces a character whose constant challenge to authority leads him down unusual paths in his search for meaning and answers, much to the dismay of colleagues. Discussed in this dissertation under the second theme—a changing notion of truth, the following example from "Snot Boogie," also illustrates asking critical questions. A creative and almost too clever alcoholic, Detective McNulty, played by Dominic West, dulls his senses every night after work to escape the knowledge of inhumane experiences people inflict on other people.

In the series' opening scene, Detective McNulty questions a witness about the murder of a boy called Snot Boogie. "Why'd you let him in the game?" he says referring to the witness's report that Snot Boogie stole from the group every time they played until someone decided to shoot him dead. The witness's answer to McNulty was, "Got to. This America man," (Simon, 2011). The United States of America, a country founded upon the notion of public discourse, urges informed public debate and discussion to continue forward as a democracy. The notion of critical questioning, of asking difficult questions, lies at the heart of public discourse. Sandel writes of the tendency of human beings to leave inquiry and practice unchecked and tells us why these conversations remain important. "For fear of disagreement we shrink from these questions, but once we see that markets change the character of goods, we have to debate among ourselves these bigger questions about how to value goods," (2013) and how to value people. Asking critical questions has the power to change values.

MCNULTY

I gotta ask you, if every time Snot Boogie would grab  
the money and run away why'd you even let him in the  
game?

WITNESS

What?

MCNULTY

Snot Boogie always stole the money, why'd you let him  
play?



## WITNESS

Got to. This America, man.

What the witness refers to is a notion of America as a democracy in which individual freedoms to act do not trump caring about and acting to preserve the rights of others to live without oppression. Where “human life is lived in the world, with diverse others...all of whom will die (and must not be eliminated prematurely), (Young-Bruehl, 2006, p.109). It also illustrates what happens to groups who began to take a familiar notion of democracy for granted as a new ideology that devalues human lives takes hold, when a market economy becomes a market society, (Sandel, 2013).

In his search for meaning while wading through absurd circumstances of people not valuing human lives, McNulty quips season-to-season, “What the fuck did I do?” as all eyes are turned toward him seeking explanations for disagreeable and controversial rule-bending behavior. His question though, can also be interpreted away from a defensive explanation to one utilizing the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice as, “what didn’t I do?” or what more could I have done?

Instilling a concept where the quality of human lives is affected by disposable income effects the notion of what it means to live in a community where everybody matters, and eventually eliminates any value placed around ‘we’re all in this together,’ (Sandel, 2013). The character of McNulty resists

digesting what is constantly laid out as numerical evidence episode to episode; he never gives up in thought or in deed in his attempts to correct what he sees as wrong, perpetually fighting against a numbers driven system and striving to fill in the in-between with stories of lived experience. In hindsight, investigating the opening scene of *The Wire* through the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice reveals that the “Snot Boogie” scene foreshadows and supports Simon’s overarching theme—that our democracy cannot survive when divided into two Americas. Consumer society fuels this disparity because all lives are not valued equally—and it is continually taken for granted by more and more people who rationalize their way around the dire impoverished conditions of fellow human beings by taking for granted that they are someone else’s problem. Stated earlier in this chapter in theme four, taking things for granted confirms hegemonic ideas; we must wield the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice to break through dominant ideologies of tagging everything with a monetary value.

Prying through examples located in the fictional story of *The Wire*, and asking critical questions about how to value people’s lives alongside the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice is one way to examine the tendency of a market society to undo the foundations of democracy. Eisler writes that we should use our gifts “to create a new economic story and reality—a caring economy that supports both human survival and human development

and actualization,” (2007, p.235). Critical pedagogues must search for these instances of story and recognition that harbor critical questions to bring back to their own discussion spaces to examine and share. *The Wire* provides such instances, illustrated here in three excerpts pulled from many throughout the series’ wrestling match with social justice issues over the “contested terrain ...of equality and inequality, individual rights and the common good,” (Sandel, 2009, p.28).

In the following examples, drug crew chief D’Angelo Barksdale asks drug-czar CEO Stringer Bell where all the money goes; a trial judge asks McNulty why he cares about a case that is not his; and stevedore Frank Sabotka, played by Chris Bauer, learns a tragic lesson about importing human cargo and wonders why he did not ask critical questions a lot sooner. For viewers concerned with a serious discussion taking place about human trafficking or the effects of the loss of manufacturing jobs through a televisual novel, “the wider truth is not undone because Frank Sabotka is a fictional character,” (Parker, 2010, p.245). *The Wire* creates valuable space for us to interrogate serious issues of systemic dysfunction, job loss, education failures, and inequality across five question-filled seasons.

### **First Example—Where Does All the Money Go?**

When D’Angelo Barksdale ventures to his uncle’s office at the back of a strip club, he enters a back-room office and encounters piles of money across

desks and tables being counted by three men: his uncle Avon Barksdale, chief operating officer Stringer Bell in a dress shirt, tie, and gold wire-rimmed glasses, and another man with an adding machine. The amount of money on the tables is visually staggering; there are bills everywhere. D'Angelo is adding his share to the piles of money and knows the profits are the results of addicts who buy a product that is killing them. He does not seem to feel remorse at the sight of the money at this point, only intrigue—but he asks a question, “Where does all the money go?” (Simon, 2011). He also gets a lesson in economics from calculating CFO Stringer Bell, whose life goal is to run profitable businesses outside of the drug trade.

Purpel writes a great deal about the value of identifying with particular moral tradition and community, without which it becomes nearly impossible to lead a moral life, (1999, p.249) but in this example the moral tradition and community D'Angelo identifies with is getting in the way of moral imagination. Purpel notes, “I certainly believe that these processes can be vital resources in the struggle to create a life of meaning but without a framework of meaning they are only neutral techniques capable of enabling good or evil,” (p.248). Stringer Bell's economics lesson is given without prejudice toward right or wrong—there is simply a trail of money. In the case of D'Angelo Barksdale, the process of questioning where the money goes and eventually connecting the money to human life steers him away from the community which negatively impacts his

ability to adapt the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice because the rules of the community he uncovers through his line of questioning do not value human lives.

**“The Buys,” Season 1, Episode 3, 26:10, (Simon, 2011).**

INTRO- D'ANGELO BARKSDALE GETS OUT OF CAB AND WALKS INTO ORLANDO'S GENTLEMAN'S CLUB. THE CLUB IS PACKED AND SMOKY, HE WALKS PAST A COUPLE OF SCANTILY CLAD POLE DANCERS, ONE OF WHICH HE STOPS TO WATCH FOR A FEW SECONDS. HE WALKS UP THE STAIRS, HIGH-FIVES SOMEONE STANDING AT A DOOR AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS. HE WALKS THROUGH A DRESSING ROOM AREA AND THROUGH ANOTHER DOOR INTO A BACK OFFICE WHERE AVON BARKSDALE, STRINGER BELL, AND ANOTHER MAN ARE SURROUNDED BY TABLES OF MONEY. STRINGER BELL IS IN BUSINESS ATTIRE.

D'ANGELO  
Where's it all go?

STRINGER  
Huh?

D'ANGELO  
The money. Where's all the money go?

STRINGER  
[LOOKS UP AT D'ANGELO, BLOWS AIR THROUGH LIPS IN TIRED EXASPERATION]

Stringer seems bothered by the intrusion and furthermore is not inclined to answer the question until he sees how much money D'Angelo is handing him.

D'ANGELO  
[TAKING A BROWN PAPER BAG FROM HIS BLACK LEATHER JACKET]  
\$22,000 or \$24,000, give or take.

STRINGER

From the low-rises?

[MAKES A NOTE ON A LEGAL PAD WITH THE PENCIL HE'S WORKING.  
ADDING MACHINE CLOSE BESIDE.]

[THEN, LAUGHING] Damn, boy! You must have that crew humming. I don't remember a day we ever got this much from the Courtyard.

D'ANGELO

It wasn't even check day.

STRINGER

You doing good out there D.

D'ANGELO

[SPEAKS STARING OFF SCREEN IN THE DIRECTION OF THE  
TABLE OF BILLS]

We'll be doing even better when we get that new package.

STRINGER

New package, same as old, man.

D'ANGELO

Say what?

STRINGER

Ain't no new package. Just gonna put that same shit out in a different color gel cap is all. Might spike that shit with some procaine or some caffeine, but otherwise the same.

D'ANGELO

String, man, people are already coming back on us  
telling us that shit is weak.

STRINGER

I know, the shit is weak. But shit is weak all over. The thing is, no matter what we call heroin, it's gonna get sold. The shit is strong, we're gonna sell it. The shit is weak, we're gonna sell twice as much. You know why? 'Cause a fiend, he's gonna chase that shit no matter what. It's crazy, you know? We do worse, and we get paid more. The government do better, and it don't mean no never mind. This shit right here [POINTS TO MONEY], Dee, it's forever.

D'ANGELO

[GLANCING AT AVON COUNTING MONEY]

STRINGER  
[HANDING DEE SOME FOLDED BILLS]  
That's a bonus there. And you buy something that you  
wouldn't otherwise.  
[WINKING AT DEE.]

D'ANGELO  
Thanks, man.  
[TURNS AND WALKS OUT. THE OTHER TWO MEN IN THE ROOM DID NOT  
STOP COUNTING MONEY DURING THE ENTIRE CONVERSATION.  
D'ANGELO GOES DOWNSTAIRS AND TALKS TO THE FEMALE DANCER  
WHO CAUGHT HIS EYE EARLIER, PLACING HIS PILE OF BILLS ON THE  
BAR.]

[END SCENE.]

By asking better questions, D'Angelo Barksdale is starting to piece together the puzzle of the drug business—the way it operates and where the money travels. At first he is easily distracted by money across his journey. Presumably because money is scarce in this neighborhood, the dealers, the Robinhood character of Omar Little, and sometimes the Baltimore Police all hand out money to the people around them in an effort to buy loyalty. Perhaps Stringer Bell feels compelled at this moment to buy D'Angelo's loyalty realizing that he is starting to figure out that the business is shifty. Remaining proud of his role right now, D'Angelo Barksdale is beginning to struggle with a lifestyle that continually lacks any defining characteristic of upholding humanity in the everyday. The money distracts him temporarily.

## **Second Example—Why Do You Care?**

This segment from the very first episode of the series, features the aftermath from an unexpected verdict in an opening courtroom scene again involving D'Angelo Barksdale and Stringer Bell. The person on trial and escaping a prison sentence is D'Angelo; Stringer Bell has maneuvered and threatened witnesses to change their testimony against the defendant, and D'Angelo is unexpectedly acquitted despite a tight case prepared by the state's attorney. Detective Jimmy McNulty attends and watches the entire trial while the arresting officer remains in his office talking on the phone about a summer house. After the verdict is read and the trial concludes, the presiding judge in the case, played by Peter Gerety, upon seeing Detective McNulty in the courtroom, asks him the question that is asked over and over throughout the series, "Why do you care?" We hear the same question asked by corner boys Bodie and Wallace of D'Angelo a couple of episodes later during the chess instruction scene, "Why do you care how we play the game?" Purpel, a champion of critical questioning says, "people are reluctant to be explicit about what they believe to be morally right," (1999, p.248).

Years before, Dewey writes that imagination is as integral to human activity as muscular movement but that it should be woven into everyday experience to tap a situation's possibilities, aided by the notion of sympathy as a way individuals make meaning from actions of others, (Fesmire, 2003, pp. 64-



67). Purpel expands upon this idea, to not only recognize imagination used in the everyday to open up possibilities, but to consciously acknowledge a moral imagination that aids and informs a personal moral code aimed at eliminating human oppression in all its forms. Purpel urges us to take a stand for issues worthy of serious consideration (p.248). In this example, although the line of questioning indicates the possibility of a different viewpoint, the questions themselves also serve to open up the space to discuss characters' use of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice. Questions such as "Why do you care," create an opening for discussion of solutions that if not asked, might go unsaid.

Another rephrasing of this theme running through the series is often bantered back and forth between characters, and we find this sentiment here in Judge Phelan's conversation with Detective McNulty as well: If a problem doesn't concern you, don't worry about it. This thought process runs counterpoint to one guided by the tool of moral imagination in consideration of ending oppression, where harm to people other than our selves becomes a concern during everyday experience. The next scene shows the conversation between Judge Phelan and Detective McNulty; I have indicated within the script in boldface type the amount of questioning. The line of critical questioning in this scene ultimately results in the wiretap setup, because parties involved are looking at possibilities from multiple sides. The teaching moment for the tool of

moral imagination is when Judge Phelan asks Detective McNulty, “Why do you care?” This phrase also hearkens back to the chess game example in theme one, everybody matters, as D’angelo Barksdale is asked the same thing, “Why do you care how we play the game?” (Simon, 2011).

**“The Target,” Season 1, Episode 1, 12:07(Simon, 2011).**

HALLWAY OUTSIDE COURTROOM. THERE IS A WOMAN RUNNING DOWN A CROWDED HALLWAY, CALLING FOR MCNULTY.

WOMAN

Detective? Detective. Judge asked to speak with you.

JUDGE’S CHAMBERS, MCNULTY SITTING ON GUEST SIDE OF DESK. JUDGE IS WALKING AROUND THE OFFICE.

JUDGE

What the hell happened out there?

MCNULTY

We lost.

JUDGE

**Were you on this?**

MCNULTY

The case?

JUDGE

Yeah.

MCNULTY

No, it was Barlow, with an assist from McLarney.

JUDGE

[SITTING DOWN] **If it was Barlow’s case, why are you in court?**

MCNULTY

No reason.

JUDGE

**You just like coming to court on murders you don't even work?** Just for the thrill of it? Now, when you start coming with the customers it's time to get out of the business.

MCNULTY

You shouldn't talk dirty now that you're a judge.

JUDGE

Now that I'm a judge, I can say anything I damn please.  
(POURS PRESCRIPTION MEDICINE INTO HIS HAND)

MCNULTY

That Barksdale kid, he's a cousin to Avon Barksdale.

JUDGE

**Who?**

MCNULTY

Avon Barksdale, Stringer Bell. The crew that's been running Franklin terrace for a year.

JUDGE

**Stringer Bell?**

MCNULTY

Yeah. That was him in court with the legal pad and the glasses scaring the living shit out of every witness. Him and the rest of his crew, Wee-Bey, Savino, Stinkum.

JUDGE

I saw them.

MCNULTY

**You think about clearing the court?**

JUDGE

On what basis? It's an open court in a free nation of laws.

MCNULTY  
(SMILING) I thought it was Baltimore.

CAMERA GOES BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN JUDGE AND MCNULTY

MCNULTY  
Barksdale has five out of seven towers in the Terrace.  
That's ten stairwells in five high-rises, going 24/7 for dope  
and coke. And that's just the towers. The low-rises, the  
avenue corners, they're all his, too.

JUDGE  
**How do you know this?**

MCNULTY  
Everybody knows it.

JUDGE  
**Define "everybody"**

MCNULTY  
Everybody on the West Side. Barksdale and Bell, they're  
the new power. I mean, they've dropped ten or twelve  
bodies in as many months. Beat three cases in court  
doing the same thing they just did to you.

JUDGE  
**Who's working on them?**

MCNULTY  
In the department? Nobody really. Why we're a little  
busy doing street rips you know? Community policing and  
all that.

JUDGE  
**So if it's not your case, why do you care?**

MCNULTY  
Who said I did?

[END SCENE.]

This theme of interfering with other people's business is reinforced by police detectives as they constantly complain about whose turn it is to work the next murder case—episode after episode no one wants to own the problem; the notion of human lives is commoditized as a murder clearance rate upon which bonuses and promotions are earned. But throughout the series, there are instances of characters acting to the contrary. Detective McNulty illustrates the questioning individual. He sleuths and maneuvers continually not only to solve cases, but to uphold human dignity, struggling in the process to maintain his own as well. Detective Bunk, played by Wendell Pierce, says to Detective McNulty continually, "There you go giving a fuck, when it ain't your turn to give a fuck," (Simon, 2011). Asking critical questions using the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice clears the path for individuals to create a caring economy by uncovering questions around the value of each life, and that each life matters.

**Third Example—"...because you didn't want to know," (Simon, 2011).**

Season two of *The Wire* introduces the loss of manufacturing jobs on a city dependent upon its working classes. The introduction of this theme coupled with an exposé on eastern European human trafficking adds another layer to the complexity faced by all races. Kathryn Edin, Harvard professor of public policy and family expert notes,

These white working-class communities—once strong, vibrant, proud communities, often organized around big

industries—they're just in terrible straits. I hang around these neighborhoods...and I think this is beginning to look like the Black inner-city neighborhoods we've been studying for the past 20 years, (Peck, 2011, p.131).

With the introduction of the dock-workers and organized crime outlets, Simon shows that socioeconomic systemic dysfunction affects people at all levels of the pay scale. Smiley and West also reflect upon the role of individual responsibility to problems heralded in the new century, "Unlike previous generations, our 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges demand a new collective vision and a return to larger measures of self-sufficiency," (2013, p.111).

Asking critical questions requires critical thinking and courage to overcome thoughts of rationalization even denial. When faced with an outcome that openly, carelessly devalues some human lives, critical questions begin to clear a path for the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice to be employed. In this next example, stevedore Frank Sabotka investigates the shipping containers that cross his docks. Sabotka represents the downwardly spiraling fate of unionized laborers at the beginning of the twentieth century, facing increasing unemployment due to lower wages overseas augmented by an influx of industrial technological solutions.

In the second season of the fictional drama *The Wire*, dockworkers eager to work show up for shifts that may or may not be available. Unable to earn a steady wage, longshoremen begin to look for illicit ways to stave off poverty and

care for families. Social justice requires strong families and likewise, strong families require social justice. One reason for family breakdown is the disappearance of well-paying jobs, (Dionne, 2014). Sabotka, a dockworker his entire adult life, does not worry about illegal activities on the docks he manages until seventeen women of eastern European origin are found suffocated in a shipping container. Greene urges us to utilize even fictionalized accounts to grasp issues in the lived experience of others. She says our ability to pose a different set of questions might awaken a conversation in others to speak about “what ought to be,” (1995, p.130) as it does here with Frank Sabotka. The willingness to risk emotional encounters with the side of human experiences that devalues human lives requires a thoughtful, critical approach. “To think in relation to what we are doing is to be conscious of ourselves struggling to make meanings, to make critical sense of what authoritative others are offering as objectively, authoritatively, ‘real’,” (1995, pp.126-130). Sabotka encounters and struggles with the consequences of his own denial and rationalization when he chooses to look the other way, resulting in needless, tragic deaths for seventeen people.

**“Collateral Damage,” Season 2, Episode 2, 3:50 (Simon, 2011).**

INTRO-AN OLD MAN WITH WIRE RIMMED GLASS IS READING  
THE NEWSPAPER.

MALE VOICE  
(NOT SPEAKING ENGLISH) Thelees allo?

THE GREEK

Ne.

FRANK SABOTKA AND NEPHEW NICK PULL UP TO THE RESTAURANT IN A RED PICKUP TRUCK. THE GREEK GETS UP LOOKS OUT THE WINDOW, FINISHES CIGARETTE, LOOKS OVER HIS GLASSES AT ANOTHER MAN [SPIROS] SITTING IN THE NEXT BOOTH WITH A "HANDLE THIS" LOOK, COMMUNICATED WITH THE NOD OF A HEAD. CAMERA SWITCHES TO SHOW SABOTKA AND NICK WALKING TOWARD THE DINER DOOR.

NICK

Hey, you don't have to do this.

SOBOTKA

No?

NICK

No, anything you gonna say I already said to Spiros.

SOBOTKA

You called him a Greek asshole?

CAMERA SHOWS SOBOTKA SITTING AT DINER TABLE WITH SPIROS AND SERGEI. NICK WATCHES FROM SLIGHTLY BEHIND FRANK SABOTKA'S RIGHT SHOULDER.

SPIROS

You think we wanted this?

Spiros asks questions that appear sympathetic; he has suffered a loss as well.

The deaths resulted in a lost capacity to make money; their loss of life is

overshadowed by his loss of profit. Saluting his failure to use the tool of moral

imagination in the service of social justice he adds, "You don't ask because you

don't want to know," (Simon, 2011). Here he finds a truth for Sabotka. As long

as the money was coming in, the stevedore did not care how the money got to



him, just that it did. The tool of moral imagination is defined as you DO ask because you DO want to know.

SOBOTKA

I don't know what the fuck you people want and don't want. All I know is I got a can full of young girls suffocating to death on my docks.

SPIROS

This was a mistake.

SOBOTKA

A mistake?! They fucking died in that can while this stupid son of a bitch sat there with his dick in his hands!

SERGEI

[SUDDENLY ATTENTIVE]

You know nothing.

SPIROS

We understand you're upset, Frank. We are upset too, okay? Sergei was supposed to wait for our friend to come off the boat. Alright? Our friend was supposed to tell us that there was no problem...you know, no customs.

SERGEI

He did not come off the boat.

SOBOTKA

Why the fuck not?

SPIROS

THIS is what we're trying to find out, we don't know.

SOBOTKA

So, because you don't get the right message, these girls are dying on my docks. This is how it goes? On my docks, this happened?

[NEPHEW NICK STANDING BEHIND LEANS DOWN AND IN TO JOIN CONVERSATION]

SPIROS

I understand how you feel, but we're upset too. Everybody. We're all upset. Nobody here wanted this.

NICK

[UNDER HIS BREATH SPEAKING TO SABOTKA]

Uncle Frank, they're saying it wasn't on purpose.

SOBOTKA

You could've told me there were girls in that fucking can. You could've told me so I didn't just shove 'em back in the stacks like I did, right? Why the fuck didn't you tell me what was in that motherfucking can?!

SPIROS

[CHASTISING] Now, you want to know what's in the cans? Before, you wanted to know nothing, now, you ask. Guns, okay? Drugs, whores... Vodka, BMWs, Beluga caviar... or bombs, maybe, hmm? Bad terrorists with big nuclear bombs. Boom. I am kidding you, Frank, it's a joke. But you don't ask...because you don't want to know.

SOBOTKA

Tell the Greek that next time he's got something breathing in one of them cans, I need to know it.

[SABOTKA GETS UP WALKS OUT.]

[END SCENE.]

At the recognition of his role in someone's death, Sobotka becomes outraged admits the role his actions and thoughtlessness played. Only by asking a hard question does he begin to take steps to make amends. Greene uses literature to create awareness that "what allows us to become conscious of alternative possibilities," also helps us to become willing to risk encounters with additional difficult questions (1995, pp.127-128); The Wire allows this same

awareness by creating a space to talk about a tragedy on so many levels. She says we may, “after the outrage and passion, also feel a longing for resolution and repair,” (p.72) which is thought guided by the tool of moral imagination. Asking hard questions aided by moral imagination’s inclination to uphold human dignity and human life in all forms helps to further hone the skill of asking better questions. With a nod to Dewey, the space of questioning opens up more space for questioning, and we are but travelers along the way.

#### **Fourth Example—When It’s Really Not Your Turn**

Mentioned in the introduction, asking critical questions also helps you to come to know yourself in a new light. Interpreting Sartre, Greene writes “This going beyond is what characterizes a person fundamentally, and what that person succeeds in making out of what he or she has been made,” (1995, p. 51). Greene’s response of i-am-what-i-am-not-yet is called forth by the question of what am I yet to be? Greene proceeds since we are always in a state of becoming, we are always changing into what we will be in the next day or even in the next hour. We are always in a process of becoming and of not yet.

In the service of social justice, the tool of moral imagination urges us to look for the “yet to be” in all people. She writes, “It is not merely contemplating. It is to come to know in ways that might bring about change,” (1995, p.68). Looking for the yet to be in self and in other people through the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice entails asking critical questions that

open up alternative possibilities to uphold human dignity. Season three finds the recovering heroin addict Bubbs, played by Andre Royo, in a state of becoming, occupying the streets of a hollowed-out neighborhood of row-houses fictionally known as Amsterdam—a drug-infested zone where both dealing and doping is temporarily “legalized” and overlooked by city police in an effort to reduce crime in other parts of the city. The example featuring the effects of Amsterdam will also be discussed in theme six, claiming responsibility.

Bubbs earns a living as a t-shirt and basic necessities salesman in this fictional legalized drug zone because there is no operating commerce other than those involving drug deals. He pushes a rusty, rattling, umbrella-covered grocery cart down the street, hawking his wares. The camerawork tells the story between the spoken lines; as Bubbs saunters along viewers see him always pushing the cart in the street, never shooting up inside a row house. Viewers also see the unimaginable conditions of rampant, open drug use, prostitution, and physical altercations that would be inevitable to a drug-legalized zone. Bubbs resists entering the space of the row houses, a vacuous space that sucks the life out of inhabitants as they anesthetize themselves against the world outside.

At one point he finds his younger heroin-addict partner-in-crime from season one, Johnny Weeks, played by Leo Fitzpatrick. The questions asked verbally in this scene between Johnny and Bubbs are also communicated

visually. "What more can I do?" When individuals eschew anesthetic interventions and act and think "free from this identification," (Marcuse, 1969, p. 24) a newness enables the individual to struggle "against violence and exploitation where this struggle is essentially waged for new ways and forms of life," (Marcuse, pp. 24-26). In this instance, asking critical questions through the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice is utilized not only to help others, but as Bubbs wrestles with his own lived experience as he ultimately begins to know and value himself. In spite of what we are taught to think about the homeless or drug-ridden population, this example illustrates an alternative history: one of a continual struggle to know self and to help others.

In the next scene, the camera frames the clearly disheveled and hollowed-out addict Johnny Weeks, lost companion of Bubbs, standing at the top of the decrepit row-house stoop just inside where a door should have been, with Bubbs standing outside on the top step. They talk with each other, weaving back and forth about the value of a constant high and the hypothetical accolades of the legalized drug-zone of the fictional Amsterdam over the street noise and confusion that goes on in the distance. When the young Johnny beckons Bubbs inside to get high once more, Bubbs eyes plead with Johnny to instead join him on the street to get clean. The exchange is sad and their gaze at each other intense. Almost giving in and walking through the doorframe, Bubbs chooses to

remain outside continuing his own journey, shuffling behind his grocery cart as make-shift traveling storefront.

**“Back Burners,” Season 3, Episode 7, 19:25 (Simon, 2011)**

INTRO—DARK STREET, BUBBLES PUSHING HIS SHOPPING CART THROUGH HAMSTERDAM.

BUBBS

[HEAR VOICE WATCHING SCREEN SHOT OF GROCERY CART MOVING SLOWLY] Got them T's, white and bright!  
One for \$3, two for \$5

CORNER BOY

[HEAR VOICE OVER TRAFFIC] Blue tops, got them blue tops!

BUBBS

I GOT THEM T'S. White, bright, one for \$3, two for \$5.

THERE ARE ADDICTS STUMBLING EVERYWHERE. THEY RESEMBLE ZOMBIES WANDERING AIMLESSLY IN THE STREETS, STUMBLING... BUBBS WALKS THROUGH THE STREET LOOKING AROUND. HE LOOKS INTO A CAR WITH TWO YOUNG WOMEN LOOKING UP AT HIM.

BUBBS

I got them...I got them T's. [SEES A MAN IN A WINDOW GETTING READY TO SHOOT UP]

CORNER BOY

[HEAR VOICE OVER TRAFFIC] Red tops, red tops, got them red tops!

ANOTHER VOICE

[HEAR VOICE OVER TRAFFIC] Rockefeller, got some Rockefeller, hey!

BUBBLES GAZES AT A FIVE YEAR OLD BOY LEANING AGAINST A METAL POLE IN HIS PAJAMAS

MAN IN DISTANCE  
Hey, seller man, what you got?

BUBBS  
Got the long white T's for the young ones.

MAN  
You ain't got no candles? I'm looking to buy candles. And toilet paper for the  
shit-bucket too.

BUBBS  
You be back here tomorrow?

MAN  
I can't leave. I leave, somebody grab my stake.

BUBBS  
I'll be back tomorrow.

BUBBS KEEPS WALKING PAST PIT FIRES IN THE STREET, OPEN  
DOORWAYS WITH PEOPLE MISBEHAVING. FINALLY SEE HIS FRIEND  
JOHNNY WEEKS ZONED OUT LEANING AGAINST A WALL.

BUBBS  
[WALKING TO STOOP] Yo, Johnny.

[WALKS UP STAIRS TO DOORWAY BUT DOESN'T GO INSIDE. JOHNNY  
WALKS OVER AND SLAPS HIS HAND.]

JOHNNY  
What's up Bubbs?

BUBBS  
[SEEING THE VERY SAD STATE OF HIS FRIEND] Shit,  
Johnny, man. [RUBBING HIS CHIN, VERY  
CONCERNED]

JOHNNY  
Just been chasing the pipe, you know? [JOHNNY'S  
FACE IS COVERED WITH SORES; HE IS UNABLE TO  
STAND WITHOUT LEANING] Shit's got me all digging  
and scratching in my arms. You know, it's cool.

THE CAMERA IS SHOOTING OVER JOHNNY'S SHOULDER WITH BUBBS SILHOUETTED AGAINST ALL HELL BREAKING LOOSE IN THE BACKGROUND. OUTSIDE IS SMOKY AND NOISEY.

BUBBS

All right. Come on, man, you need a break, all right?  
I'm serious man, you need a break. Come on, man.

JOHNNY

No, man, look around you. It's a soldier's paradise, man.

[THE TWO ARE STANDING ABOUT A FOOT APART. JOHNNY INSIDE THE ROW HOUSE, BUBBS STANDING ON THE STOOP. JOHNNY STARTS EERILY LAUGHING, DOUBLES OVER. HEAR BOTTLES BREAKING, A FIGHT BREAKS OUT IN THE DISTANCE.]

Ironically Johnny uses the common vernacular "soldier" to describe himself.

Does he see himself as a soldier, someone willing to put community before self-gratification. Or does his drug-addled condition blur the legalized drug-zone as a paradise for players in the game? There is a possible answer in his final sentences to Bubbs as he compares himself to a Viking warrior. It may be this absurd comparison that convinces Bubbs to stay on the outside of the row house.

JOHNNY

I'm a Viking, Bubs. [WHISPERS] Are you a Viking?

BUBBS WATCHES THE POLICE BREAK UP A FIGHT. LOOKS BACK INTO THE DOORWAY WHERE JOHNNY IS NO LONGER STANDING. HE STARTS TO GO IN, THEN QUICKLY TURNS AND GOES BACK DOWN THE STAIRS. HE LOOKS BACK OVER HIS SHOULDER AS HE CONTINUES DOWN THE STAIRS, CANDLES BURNING INSIDE.

[END SCENE.]



Also illustrating the second theme of this definition of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice is Bubbles' struggle with individuality, emerging as transcendence in the midst of darkness (West, 2004, p. 91), his life indeed an experiment as he learns and adapts from lived experiences. His former nihilistic existence of drug dependence not so different from the lure of money, status or power left him unable to embrace a dignified lived existence of others. He was unable to recognize this quality because his senses were dulled, anesthetized through habitual drug use. While also a blazing indictment of a prevalent drug culture, Bubbs emergence from this scene illustrates another use for the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice—to identify self-worth through asking better questions. The character of Bubbles creates a space to talk about the struggle to live in a space where people are trying to make money at all costs.

### **Theme Six: People Claiming Responsibility**

In this theme I will explore two foundational pillars for applying the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice: Purpel's denial and rationalization as a means to avoid claiming responsibility and Greene's notion of unfinishedness. To live life most fully through individual responsibility in an ever-changing community, we must protect the dignity and purpose of all lives through eyes wide awake, through asking critical questions, and through claiming responsibility for eliminating oppression and upholding human dignity.

Greene writes, “It is the idea of possibility that remains important. Along with it comes the recognition of incompleteness,” (2007, p.3) and the idea that we are always in a process of becoming. The last theme of this discussion depicts people taking actions of possibility in support of others even at cost to self. In each instance an idea rises to consciousness—that different outcomes are possible for people willing to acknowledge all people matter.

The first example introduces one of the series heroes, former inmate turned boxing coach Dennis “Cutty” Wise, played by Chad Coleman, as he journeys toward a life lived in service of upholding community and claiming responsibility for others. The second example revisits the character of Wallace, as he opts out of a drug trafficking life that does not value all people, literally denouncing a market society where values on human lives have approached zero in his experience. He does not succeed in his quest, as readers of this dissertation know after reading of his murder in theme three, thoughtlessness. Here however, Wallace takes a stand for “justice and peace...a sense that what we do has meaning and helps others as well as ourselves,” (Eisler, 2007, p. 235). He decides that the game is NOT the game, and that profit does not trump the right to live without oppression in community as he takes actions to live in “a world where our children survive and thrive,” (p.235). The third example reintroduces Bunny Colvin, played by Robert Wisdom, and shows a conversation between complicit parties within the configuration of a fictional

legalized drug zone known to series characters as Hamsterdam. In hopes of creating safer neighborhood experiences for law-abiding citizens, Major Colvin risks all in an experiment to localize drug sales and use within a specific few blocks of boarded up row houses. His actions result in lower crime rates throughout the district and peaceful neighborhood streets; in his experiment however, he neglects to value the drug users and dealers themselves, and the children that follow them.

The fourth example depicts the development of an unintended consequence of Major Colvin's actions in Hamsterdam. Earning a form of respect from neighborhood drug dealers and communities he attempted to help, now-retired police Major Bunny Colvin gains access to the imprisoned father of a youth that he wants to raise. This last example shows the prison visiting-room discussion between the father and Bunny Colvin illustrating connectedness and points of commonality gained through the dialectic, and also illustrates the notion of possibility and of putting someone else's needs before your own as an act of responsibility. This discussion reminds us of Greene's admonition, "To tell the story is to search for its meaning without ever being sure of the end," (2007, p.3). In each example, moral imagination in the service of social justice becomes the basis of faith in possibilities expressed as a critical question from an unexpected source.

### **First Example— The Game Ain't in Me No More**

In season three, Dennis “Cutty” Wise points a loaded gun at the head of a young corner dealer who owes him money, but right before he pulls the trigger, he looks to his right. The camera shows the lifeless body of an even younger boy leaking blood from a gunshot wound onto the curb below. Cutty recognizes an asthma inhaler laying on the ground beside the boy—what he thought was a reach for a gun; he lowers a pointed gun and his opportunistic target flees down the alley bracing almost in a trance watching his target run away. Cutty’s partner, old-school Slim Charles, played by Anwan Glover, approaches and quips as if he’s playing a video game, “Damn I shot too early and messed up your shot. Come on.” (Simon, 2011). Cutty spares the younger teen’s life and regains control over his own in the short time it took to recognize the humanity present in the face of the boy. He looked into the face of a human being instead of the face of a target. He dropped the moniker “The game is the game,” and instead decided that human lives matter. Later he admits,

I couldn’t squeeze the trigger. I couldn’t do it. Whatever it is that’s in you and allows you to flow and do that thing, it ain’t in me no more...the game ain’t in me no more. None of it, (Simon, 2011).

In this instant of wide-awakeness, acting on recognition of valuable human life, he starts to purposefully employ the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice. Viewers see him struggle, vanish and resurface from a

space where he does not think about his actions or their implications into a space of critical thinking and valuing the lives of others and reclaiming responsibility for the community around him. The next example illustrates this transformation as the two explain the outcome of their caper to kingpin Avon Barksdale.

**“Homecoming,” Season 3, Episode 3, 52:26 (Simon, 2011).**

52:26

INTRO—SLIM CHARLES AND CUTTY ENTER AVON’S BACK OFFICE AT THE FUNERAL HOME. AVON IS SITTING DOWN.

AVON  
How’d it go?

SLIM CHARLES  
We got one of the two of them motherfuckers, you know?

AVON  
You mean, you motherfuckers come strolling in here all walking tall and shit

SLIM CHARLES  
Yo, B, man, I’m saying, man we was blazing on them dudes. Man, you know what I’m saying? Just got in the heat, man. We was blazing, though.  
It was like...

AVON  
All right, all right. Relax, man. I already heard. Go sit down. I’m not tweaking behind none of this. That’s one less motherfucker that’s breathing than was yesterday. You know what I’m saying? So we all good.  
[TO CUTTY] But I’m surprised at you, though, man. Shit didn’t get by you back when.

SLIM CHARLES  
Wasn’t my man’s fault, man. I unloaded on the young’un too soon, man. Gave him enough room to buck and run, man. I fucked that shit up myself, you know.

CUTTY

Hold on. [STEPS FORWARD]

It's on me. I had that kid in my sights close enough to take off his Kangol and half his dome with it. Couldn't squeeze the trigger. Couldn't do it, man.

AVON

[STILL SEATED] Why not?

CUTTY

Wasn't in me, I guess. You know, whatever it is in YOU that lets you flow like you flowing...do that thing...It ain't in me no more.

AVON

[SIGHS, LOOKS TO RIGHT] A'ight. So you done soldiering, but you ain't done. We're gonna put you on a corner, you could be inside.

CUTTY

[SIGHING] No, man. I ain't making myself clear. The game ain't in me no more. None of it.

The tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice replaces the game moniker "It's just business," as an excuse to devalue human lives.

AVON

But you ain't done shit else.  
You know what I'm saying? So what you gonna do?

CUTTY

I don't know...But it can't be this.

He exhibits Greene's adage, "I am what I am not yet;" he does not know what he is going to be, but the space encompassing devaluation of human lives is not where he wants to remain.

AVON  
A'ight then. We straight. [GETS UP SHAKES HAND, HUGS CUTTY. CUTTY  
LOOKS SHOCKED.]

SLIM CHARLES  
[ALSO GETS UP HUGS CUTTY] See you.

CUTTY  
See you.

SLIM CHARLES  
B, he was a man in his time, you know?  
AVON  
Yeah. He a man today. [THOUGHTFULLY] He a man.

[END SCENE.]

Purpel explains the purpose of a life lived with others,

Whatever else people are called upon to do, they have the inevitable, agonizing, and exhilarating task of constructing ways in which we are to live with each other. Each of us participates willy-nilly in this extraordinarily vital process, however unaware we might be, however tiny or major our impact, however beneficial or destructive the contribution, (1999, p. 133).

When Cutty opts out of the game, he is choosing in both an agonizing and exhilarating way the manner in which he chooses to live with others in community. In choosing freedom for others, he chooses freedom for himself. He does not choose freedom for himself at the expense of others. Cutty, “knew that he owed himself to all and that he could count only on himself alone... And by choosing for himself in liberty, he chose the liberty of all, (Sartre, 1947, p.500).

In a market society, self-interest and greed is often blurred, (Sandel, 2009) which is often the case as soldiers in the fictionalized drug trade storyline of *The Wire* wield power and control at every opportunity in order to protect the 'stash,' or drug product. Cutty's actions to uphold human life employ the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice to fend off the ensuing dominant ideology illustrated within the drug trade storyline where some human lives are more valuable than others.

Greene notes that there are many instances where people "feel hopelessly isolated from a world where people coming together might bring change," (1988, p. 25). The character of Dennis "Cutty" Wise illustrates Greene's concept of constantly becoming as he leaves his soldier role in the Barksdale organization in season three and works to open a boxing gym for the youth and corner boys viewers meet in season four. Cutty's transformed role brings change. At the moment he lowers his gun-pointing arm, Cutty divorces himself from the notion of isolation and hopelessness and instead claims a role of responsibility for his community, stepping into a space of support for fellow human beings by using the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice.

### **Second Example—I Said I Don't Wanna Play**

The softhearted Wallace, played by Michael B. Jordan, struggles in season one with a sense of self-discovery set within unfair but established



ground rules of surviving on his own. He displays the same thoughtful intent as Cutty, admitting that the game wasn't "in" him. In the next example, Wallace speaks to D'Angelo Barksdale adamantly stating his intent not to play anymore, as if he had just decided to put away his dice and leave a board game. But viewers of the series know the character of Wallace is talking about his role in the game of sales and distribution of illegal drugs where the collateral damage is murder of human beings.

The character of Wallace was introduced in this dissertation in the first example of the third theme discussing his role in the identification of a Barksdale nemesis turned human target as an example of thoughtlessness. This next example shows the impact of Wallace's decision to quit the game as an example of claiming responsibility for one's actions and moving toward change with consideration of valuing human dignity. The character of Wallace, embracing qualities of caring and nurturing (Eisler, 2007, p.124), takes action to change his course through the tool of moral imagination in the service of alleviating oppression and valuing human lives, and exhibits Purpel's definition of transformation by embracing moral outrage in the face of unnecessary pain and suffering of someone else. By embracing the tool of moral imagination, he rejects the dominant ideology in the market society of drug-trafficking "where hierarchies of domination...flowed only from the bottom up and orders were to be unquestioningly obeyed," (Eisler, p.124). Purpel writes that this type of angst

is absolutely necessary for individuals to effect change and to challenge the dominant discourse of “achievement, competition, and standardization,” (1999, p.189) typically viewed as “masculine ‘hard’ qualities,” (Eisler, p.124) of the sort viewers encountered in the storyline’s cross section of drug-trafficking and human obsolescence.

The character of Wallace intends to leave the corner and re-enroll in high school seeing education as the only way out of a life riddled by angst and suffering and toward a life of value and meaning. By extension, Wallace is leaving a space of domination and heading toward the space of education, seeing it as opposite of the dominant ideological predisposition where human lives are not valued and orders are unquestioningly obeyed. *The Wire* picks up on this misconception as well as it places the benchmarks and test scores in the business of education against the police force murder clearance rate at the beginning of season four. When human lives are commodified, values are changed in the process. Wallace is trading one game for another less lethal game.

Season four of *The Wire* explores the American system of schooling and standardized testing, and the life of youngsters caught between the corner and the classroom, “exposing and examining the impact of entrenched interests and structural inequalities of American public life,” (Kadlec, 2007, p.4). Four examples around the notion of formal schooling are discussed in this chapter:

theme four, beyond the taken-for-granted in examples one and three; and again in this chapter in themes six and seven, first as Wallace expresses a yearning to change his life by reenrolling in school, and the last example as prison inmate Wee-Bay Brice states to his wife, played by Hassan Johnson and Sandi McCree respectively, “The man says my boy can be anything he wants to be,” (Simon, 2011) but that we have to get him off the corner. Simon vividly translates the lived experience of children in the two Americas through the fictional characters of *The Wire*; the story is exemplary of Purpel’s description of schooling as neither creative nor joyful (1989), yet remains for most the only way out of poverty. “What a wonderful world it would be if what academics studied and taught was not only personally interesting but also socially important,” (Purpel, 1999, p. 17).

Notions of education in *The Wire* are depicted across school settings, interrogation rooms, human relationships, and drug dens. The series might be used to open up spaces of serious discussion for ways in which Purpel’s notion of holistic education might be re-envisioned to support the children in Simon’s description of a second America, that is—the children who don’t matter. The tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice is ignited by the notion that everybody matters; this notion is foundational to the theories of Purpel, Greene and Dewey discussed in this dissertation.

The following excerpt from season one is four episodes after Wallace, played by Michael B. Jordan, identifies a man to the Barksdale people, who later leave the man dead and torn up on the hood of a car outside a broken down building where Wallace sleeps. Unable to process the enormity of his action when confronted with the brutal consequences, he caves in and tells all to the police. In hopes of protecting their witness, Lieutenant Daniels, played by Lance Riddick, drives the young man to live with his grandmother for a while. The next scene takes place after Wallace returns from his months-long sojourn out of the lived existence of “the pit,” as he clearly delineates to D’Angelo his decision to choose a different path. By placing himself first, he stakes a claim against the market society in which he finds himself and illustrates how self-interest in the pursuit of freedom from the dominant ideological notions of oppression can dislodge inequality by asking critical questions of how to live in community with others. Wallace decides that living in community means to value the lives of everybody, including his own.

**“Game Day,” Season 1, Episode 9, 4:30 (Simon, 2011).**

OUTSIDE—TWO YOUNG MEN SEEMINGLY RELAXED TALKING IN THE PIT; ONE ON ORANGE SOFA ONE IN LOW TO GROUND OLD STYLE WOVEN LAWN CHAIR WITH STAINLESS STEEL ARMS.

D’ANGELO  
So what you do for money?

WALLACE  
Can’t live without it, right?

D'ANGELO

You still fucked up about that stick up man? Shit ain't on you. It ain't on me neither. Motherfucker who robbed the stash, shot Sterling. He gonna get got, no matter what you or me do.

WALLACE

I just I don't wanna play, I don't wanna play no more. A'ight? I was thinkin about goin to school, over at Edmondson, Ask if they'll let me back in at the end of the semester.

D'ANGELO  
What grade?

WALLACE  
Ninth.

D'ANGELO  
Ninth? Shit you how old?

WALLACE  
16.

D'ANGELO  
16? Damn, man, you supposed to be a junior by now.

WALLACE  
I heard Stinkum got killed.

D'ANGELO  
Yeah. [LOOKS AWAY BROW FURROWED]

WALLACE  
Damn.

D'ANGELO  
[STIL SEATED, GETS MONEY OUT OF HIS PANTS POCKET; LEANS OVER  
HANDS WALLACE FOLDED \$100 BILL]

WALLACE  
Yo I said I don't wanna play

D'ANGELO

I heard you. And you ain't gotta do nothing. Hurry up, nigger, people lookin. Look here man, you a smart little motherfucker. You start back up at Edmondson, you likely to finish up at Harvard or some shit like that. Believe, B. And you, you got a good heart in there too, not like the rest of these niggers.

[THE TWO LOOK AT EACH OTHER.]

[END SCENE.]

In above dialogue between Wallace and D'Angelo, viewers witness D'Angelo portraying Dewey's recognition of and responsibility for place in community accompanied by a resistance to a life dulled by devaluation of others, what West describes as a "longing for norms and values that can make a difference, a yearning for principled resistance and struggle that can change our desperate plight," (1989, p.4). D'Angelo's progressive coming of age story from meaningless, nihilistic obedience to authority changes drastically when he learns of Wallace's murder. D'Angelo's awakening arrives late, but provides a balanced narrative for the place of moral imagination and individual responsibility within community.

Beginning with the concept that everybody matters in the first theme of this discussion as he explains the game of chess and life to Wallace and Bodie at the beginning of season one, through the concept of thoughtlessness and banality in theme three as he helps to inform on the whereabouts of a human target, to a recognition of the dignity of all people when he discusses the humanness of the drug fiends in theme four, beyond the taken for granted. At

the end of season one, as D'Angelo Barksdale is interrogated by Detective Jimmy McNulty and Lieutenant Daniels, played by Lance Reddick, he asks them to understand that he is from a long familial line of drug dealers—everyone in his family is involved in the drug trade; it is his lot in life, unexamined until recently.

### **Third Example—Hamsterdam**

By identifying the role of police work as caretakers of human beings rather than warrior-soldiers, Major Bunny Colvin uses the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice to improve the lives of the non-drug using population in his district by relocating the dealers to one area. At the end of season three he explains how the war on drugs has turned into a war on people,

This drug thing, this ain't police work. No, it ain't. I mean, I can send any fool with a badge and a gun up on them corners and jack a crew and grab vials. But policing? I mean, you call something a war and pretty soon everybody gonna be running around acting like warriors. They gonna be running around on a damn crusade, storming corners, slapping on cuffs, racking up body counts. And when you at war, you need a fucking enemy. And pretty soon, damn near everybody on every corner is your fucking enemy. And soon the neighborhood that you're supposed to be policing, that's just occupied territory, (Simon, 2011).

However, what Colvin accomplishes is not what he intended to do. By centralizing the drug market, he creates a circle within which no lives are valuable. Lives within the fictionalized neighborhood are not valued and are sacrificed to the market of profit, both as drug sales and in lowering of crime

rates in the rest of the district. Throughout season three, the camera frames small children hanging around the deserted Amsterdam row houses, a fictional drug-crazed free zone where the trade runs unhampered by Baltimore police. Some children drink from a brown paper bag, others are just squatting on the stoops staring. The children are the out-of-work hoppers from the drug corners and they are everywhere as a result of a fictionalized drug legalization program within the borders of the Amsterdam neighborhood in the storyline. The corner children teeter on the edge of dark spaces inside the row houses and the rough, teeming streets outside. Their presence here is the explanation for lower crime rates throughout the city being claimed by politicians seeking re-election, yet their absences go unreported and unnoticed even in the schools where these children are enrolled. Both the school system and the police departments play a game of “a statistics-driven performance review...touted as a revolution in strategic policing...that created unhealthy strains and subtly encouraged officers to twist the numbers,” (Hendel, 2012.)

Staff Sergeant Ellis Carver, played by Seth Gilliam, does notice. Thinking out loud to his partner while the camera zooms in and around the Amsterdam hoppers he confides, “It’s them I worry about,” (Simon, 2011). Unable to save the children, the Sisyphean role of Sergeant Ellis Carver, whose “meaning and dignity are derived from continuous and never ending engagement in the task of creating a better world in the face of an awareness of its futility,” (Purpel, 1999,



p.137) accesses the tool of moral imagination in consideration of upholding human dignity to establish a salaried pay system for the hoppers he helped to put out of work by legitimizing the drug zone of Hamsterdam. His efforts are continually thwarted season to season, but he does not stop trying to improve the situations of the children he encounters. In this example, Carver resists admitting that the Hamsterdam area is a mistake, he rationalizes that helping the children that are caught in between makes up for the human carnage that builds up everywhere.

Specific actions by characters are uncovered through the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice that value human dignity even in the most absurd situations. The next example features Major “Bunny” Colvin, played by Robert Wisdom, speaking with policeman Ellis Carver, and Deacon, a church leader played by Baltimore native Melvin Williams, about the fictional legalized drug- zone area called Hamsterdam established in an admirable if flawed effort to rid the city of crime—“a heroic and virtuous struggle that ultimately end[ed] in failure,” (Purpel, 1999, p. 137). Discussing the rejuvenation of the Westside neighborhoods, Major Colvin proudly shows off the Hamsterdam area to the dismay of the Deacon.

**“Moral Midgetry” Season 3, Episode 8, 5:04 (Simon, 2011).**

INT — MAIL CARRIER WALKING PAST GRAFFITI WALLS AND ROUNDING CORNER, SORTING MAIL AS HE WALKS. IT’S A BRIGHT SUNNY DAY.

WOMEN ARE WATERING FLOWERS, WALKING ON STREETS CARRYING GROCERIES. NOT A CORNER BOY IN SIGHT.

MAJOR COLVIN

In your life did you think you would ever again see Mount and Fayette like this? Those ain't touts you're hearing brother. Those are birds chirping.

DEACON

How?

MAJOR COLVIN

I'll show you.

CAMERA SWITCHES TO THE DEACON SLOWLY WALKING DOWN A SIDEWALK CROWDED WITH SLINGERS, CARS DRIVING SLOWLY AND STOPPING TO GIVE MONEY. A WOMAN STAGGERS BY HIM PUTTING ON HER SHIRT. WE HEAR CHATTER AND CALLS IN THE BACKGROUND.

TEENAGE BOY

Yo, yo, yo, yo. You up, old man?

Here a random teenage drug dealer in Hamsterdam asks the Deacon if he wants to purchase a vial of heroin. Throughout the series the phrase "re-up" is used to indicate that the drug supply is available for purchase and sometimes handouts; "You up?" asks the individual directly if they want to buy.

COLVIN

They do have a point though, right?

COLVIN AND CARVER ARE DISCUSSING A HOLD-UP THAT HAS JUST OCCURRED IN AN ABANDONED ROW HOUSE. CAMERA SHOWS A MAN FOLLOWING A WOMAN WALKING PURPOSEFULLY BEHIND COLVIN TALKING ABOUT THE MERITS OF HIS EXPERIMENT

COLVIN

I mean, we tell them to come down here without the guns...and then we fall down on providing protection.

CARVER

It's like the stickup crews have these hoppers feeling like they live in a lamb pen. They see one more gun, Gandhi-world falls apart, this I guarantee.

CAMERA SHOWS PEOPLE MILLING IN AND ABOUT ABANDONED BUILDINGS, PASSED OUT IN FRONT WINDOWS, FURNITURE MOVED TO THE FRONT LAWN.

COLVIN

So what are you doing about it?

CARVER

I sent a few of the vics over to the district with Herc. Let them play with an Ident-A-Kit, but you know how that goes. Can I be honest? It's not just the wolves circling the corral. We got 50, 60 kids on the inside been fight or flight since they popped out the chute and right now they're just thumb-up-their-ass hanging. All these ex-runners, ex-lookouts. That shit worries me as much as any carnivores out there.

[CAMERA SHOWS A STOOP WITH WHAT APPEARS TO BE A TEN YEAR OLD BOY DRINKING OUT OF A BROWN PAPER BAG]

COLVIN

If you want to neutralize a threat, give it a job.

CARVER

As?

COLVIN

Auxiliary cops. Keep an eye out for the predators. You got the dealers paying them to do nothing no-how anyway. Kill two birds and all that.

CARVER

[SARCASTICALLY] Right. Throw them some bikes, maybe police radios.

COLVIN

We could do that.

CARVER  
I was being...you're serious?

DEACON  
[walks briskly up to COLVIN and CARVER]  
What in God's name did you do here?

HOPPER VOICE IN THE BACKGROUND  
WMD. Got them WMDs.

[END SCENE.]

Deacon brings the two officers back into focus as they discuss using the drug-zone's children as neighborhood watchdogs. Williams character, Deacon, is convincingly, abjectly confused and even appalled as he asks Major Colvin, "What in God's name did you do here?" (Simon, 2011). Major Colvin's actions served to protect the "law abiding" citizens of Baltimore, while Deacon's use of the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice helped him to stand firm on the concept that everybody matters; Hamsterdam clearly did not stand up to this principle. He interpreted Bunny Colvin's solution as one devaluing human dignity.

No stranger to life on the streets, Williams "once dominated the city's heroin trade with an organization that employed more than 200 street-level dealers," (Siegel, 1999, p.1) before he was arrested by *The Wire* series co-creator Ed Burns. Here Williams describes his nemesis:

'I respect him, unlike many police officers I've met,' Williams says of series co-creator Burns, speaking slowly and deliberately, never cracking a smile. 'He never straddled the

line. Didn't fabricate evidence. He had one agenda--to put Melvin in the penitentiary. He was as honorable and as sincere at being a cop as I was at being a criminal,' (Danois, 2004, p.2).

Much of *The Wire*'s story is taken from Williams own story, though he is now living a life within the law. The legalized Baltimore drug-zone of Hamsterdam, however, is purely make-believe.

#### **Fourth Example—Wee-bay “Lets Go” of His Son**

Greene questions how we might help other people deal with dark and uninspiring imaginations or to instead stimulate possibilities, (2007). Wee-Bay Brice, played by Hassan Johnson, tells his wife that their son Namond is going to live with Bunny Colvin, essentially a stranger to both of them. Continually concerned with whether he is profiting from selling on the corner, she has never asked herself what else her child could be as long as her own material needs are met; the market society of the drug culture clouds recognition of maternal nurturing and caretaking her character might otherwise exude. It took Bunny Colvin as an outsider to recognize Namond as “not yet” and still in the process of becoming, who began to claim responsibility by asking critical questions, like can I do for this child? WHAT IF this child comes to live with me? Greene writes that we can help others to think beyond the norm by asking new questions.

When officials and local media outlets discover the free-range drug fiends roaming in Hamsterdam at the end of season three, Major Colvin shields the

blame losing not only his stripes but also part of his pension benefits. By the end of season four, Colvin assists a university researcher to study the effects of early intervention into the corner culture through a group of eighth graders at a Westside middle school. His role is largely that of interpreter as he works to pick apart and connect the stories that come out; everybody matters in this class and the teachers work deliberately and tirelessly to connect the schooling to students' life on the streets not only through core courses but also taking up potentially hard to assess teachings of trust, self-worth, responsibility, and social skills. This dissertation discusses two examples around the schooling of this group of children in theme four—beyond the taken for granted as another former officer Roland Prysbylewski gets ready to teach eighth grade math, and when Bunny Colvin speaks with school administrators. Both Colvin and Prysbylewski stake out a role of looking for the unexpected, of casting off the dominant ideology by purposefully looking past the taken for granted, and of asking critical questions and trying out new ideas through the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice. Their freedom to act in this manner is not claimed at the expense of others' freedom, but is pursued because of the perceived impact to uphold others' lives through directing their own actions. No longer in denial or attempting to rationalize around dominant ideologies, both characters claim responsibility for the state of the human condition in their community.

“Bunny” Colvin, having lost the title of “Major,” develops relationships with the children in this class of students from the corners. Intimately knowing the histories of the children and desperately wanting to make a difference, he approaches the father of one of the children, Wee-Bay Brice, currently serving a prison sentence for murder. Viewers were first introduced to Namond Brice at the beginning of season four as he worried about who to date in the coming year, what to wear to school, and quickly changing the channel on the Baltimore mayoral debates to play a game of Halo II. By the beginning of season five, Namond Brice is living with Bunny Colvin and his wife, in a Baltimore row house with a well-groomed front yard and competing in debate club at school. A Hollywood ending on the streets of Baltimore? Perhaps. But considered in light of Dewey’s notion of community—one that stretches across stories and connects through time—a different discussion emerges of two men on opposite sides of the table who find meaning and connection through histories they share. The phrase “I remember” is uttered throughout their discussion amid chuckles and recognition.

Approaching the same subject through Purpel’s possibility of possibilities, the storyline opens up a space for viewers to discuss possibilities around better education and support systems for children that fall off the grid, and education is a multidimensional endeavor. He notes the public has a responsibility “to critically examine the moral, political, and economic assumptions that provide

the context for educational policies and practices,” (1999, p.5). When Wee-Bay says that his son can be anything he wants to be, he sounds like he believes it. The following example illustrates utilization of moral imagination in the service of social justice not just on the part of the retired police major, but also on the part of Namond’s father, who “lets go” of his son and entrusts him to a new father-figure.

**“Final Grades,” Season 4, Episode 13, 42:19, (Simon, 2011).**

PRISON VISITING ROOM. BUNNY COLVIN IS SITTING IN CHAIR. WEE-BAY ENTERS, WALKS OVER AND SITS OPPOSITE COLVIN ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PARTITION.

WEE-BAY

I remember you. You used to be a roll-up on Pennsy and Fremont.

COLVIN

Yeah. It was my old post.

WEE-BAY

I came up with C.B.S.

COLVIN

Calhoun, Baker, Stricker. Yeah I used to have to bang up on y’all all the time.

WEE-BAY

I remember that too.

COLVIN

I ain’t a cop now right? I mean like I told Cutty, I’m sort of like a teacher now, and that’s how I come to know Namond.

WEE-BAY

Only reason I’m even here is Cutty spoke for you.



COLVIN  
He say what I'm asking?

WEE-BAY  
[Gives a facial expression that says 'go on']

COLVIN  
Your boy is smart and funny, and open-hearted and he got some flex in him.  
And I ain't see it at first, 'cause he was always acting out, always full up of  
corner talk, you know, just talking shit to hide his self. But he could go a lot of  
places and do a lot of things in his life, be out there in the world in a way that,  
you know, didn't happen for you and me. I mean, you know, our kind? Shit. Man,  
we both know we gonna go to our grave forever knowing what block Bentalou  
dead-ends at, or who got their liquor license at over the Underground, or what  
corner Tater-man got shot on when he come out the Musical Lounge back in  
'88.

WEE-BAY  
Division and Gold.  
[BOTH MEN ARE LAUGHING AT THE MEMORY]

The boy in question, Namond Brice, played by Julito McCollum, is not  
living in poverty. Viewers see him enter his reasonably well-appointed home  
and encounter his bejeweled mother and the tropical fish extravaganza  
belonging to his father in their basement; they are living very well from the profits  
of the drug trade. What viewers do know is that the corner children are caught  
in a cycle, their fathers, even their grandfathers were all drug traffickers.

COLVIN  
The Westside we knew—it's dead, man. You know, people in the game  
nowadays, I mean, it's a whole different breed – no code, no family, and damn  
sure no respect. I mean, you send Namond out on them corner now, I'm giving  
him maybe one, two years before he down at the morgue. And maybe, if you're  
lucky, up here with you.

WEE-BAY

Maybe, maybe not. That's the game.

COLVIN

I'm talking about Namond here, Mr. Brice. He's a lot of things, a lot of good things. I mean before you know, he might surprise all of use given half a chance, but he ain't made for them corners, man. I mean, not like we were. That's why I come down here – because I gotta believe that you see it, being who you are and all you've been through. You know your son.

WEE-BAY

[SEARCHES CEILING FOR ANSWERS, LOOKS DOWN, SIGHS]

COLVIN

It's in your hands man.

WEE-BAY

You asking too much.

COLVIN

Yeah, but I'm asking.

[END SCENE.]

This scene shows Greene's use of instances from history or literature, "Instances of people who feel themselves to be determined by outside forces or by some nameless fatality," (1988, p. 25) to discover possibilities. It also illustrates the father's comprehension of his son as something Greene refers to as not yet, becoming and consistently in the yet to be. The 14-year-old Namond Brice is drug-trade royalty because of his father's role in the Barksdale organization, but he will never be a solidier. Namond's mother brings her son to visit his father multiple times in prison; the father talks to Namond about succeeding on the corners—speaking about his job on the corner in the same

way a parent might ask a child how they're doing in school. Remember, in corner culture it is a source of pride to be a soldier, even serving time in jail is a badge of honor. It is part of "just doing business." Although a convicted murderer, Wee-Bay Brice uses the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice to connect with a shared history of Bunny Colvin, and begins a dialogue of asking critical questions when presented with alternative possibilities for his son.

### **Fifth Example—Clearance Rates**

In this example I look at Purpel's belief that we should reduce unnecessary human suffering, "responsible for its amelioration, if not its elimination," (1999, p.4) even at the cost of "just business," in this case the police business of having high clearance rates for murder cases. The last episode of season four shows a defeated Bubbs, played by Andre Royo, sitting in the same police interrogation room through which viewers have watched so many characters journey. He has turned himself in for the murder of a younger colleague, another homeless boy whom Bubbles has cared for and taught throughout the season. Jay Landsman, played by Delaney Williams, is a "John Goodman-sized" (Simon, 2011) police sergeant typically found sitting behind his desk griping about wiping the names of victims from his white board to improve the department's clearance rate while eating a huge sandwich or grazing through pornographic magazines. But this time it's Landsman who enters the

interrogation room, sporting a Christmas holiday-themed tie. As Bubbles mumbles over and over that he killed this boy, sometimes incoherently, he is so distraught that he spews vomit across the table onto Sergeant Landsman. The sergeant stands up without anger—he stands tall—and asks Detective Ed Norris, played by Detective Ed Norris, to get Bubbles something with sugar in it. He walks to the bathroom where the camera shows him cleaning up the mess on his tie, and looking intently at the man he sees in the bathroom mirror, true to form chuckling at the obnoxious graffiti on the bathroom wall.

He goes back to the interrogation room to find Bubbles hanging from the light in the center of the room, his belt used as a noose. The camera zooms out to show a very large Landsman and a strong detective urgently rushing to release the limp, crumpled body of Bubbles from the noose. The giant sergeant literally lifts Bubbles up from death. They lay the very small, still-breathing body of a drug-fiend on the only table in the room and call 911. Landsman comes in later, reaches out and touches Bubbles, and listens to the story of how Bubbles tried to follow the rules of the game to deal with the plight of being robbed and beaten weekly, of how the pesticide Sherrod shot into his arm was never meant for anyone but the robber. Landsman walks out of the interrogation room and tells the detective to put this death down as unsolved. The detective says, “What about the clearance rate?” to which Landsman replies, “Fuck the clearance rate,” (Simon, 2011).

**“Final Grades,” Season 4, Episode 13, 0:08 and 8:29, (Simon, 2011).**

JAY LANDSMAN WALKING THROUGH THE POLICE OFFICE, CARRYING COFFEE CUP, FRESH BLUE SHIRT, LOUD CHRISTMAS TIE, LARGE KHAKI TRENCHCOAT, HUMMING A JAZZY JINGLE BELL ROCK, WALKS UP TO WHITE BOARD AND LOOKS AWAY IN DISGUST UPON SEEING SOMEONE ADD NAMES TO THE UNSOLVED MURDERS COLUMN.

LANDSMAN  
All that from overnight?

POLICE OFFICER  
All that from Freamon. He's out early today rooting through empties.

LANDSMAN  
[STOPS, SPEAKS TO DETECTIVE WITH BACK TURNED, BUT HE'S FACING THE CAMERA AND WE CAN SEE A GRIMACE ON HIS FACE]  
You know what he is? He is a vandal. He is vandalizing the board. He is vandalizing this unit. He is a Hun, a Visigoth, a barbarian at the gate, clamoring for noble Roman blood and what's left of our clearance rate. And you sit here doing what exactly?

DETECTIVE  
A hot-shot, maybe. I got a sack in the box, says he owns one from a couple days ago. White coat alley.

The detective is referring to the statement Bubbles gave when he showed up at the police station, that he is responsible for the death of a young man. Bubbles is “the sack in the box”. “White coat alley” is a reference to his mental condition.

LANDSMAN  
What the fuck is wrong with you people? Is everybody on a crusade to make more murders out of bullshit?

DETECTIVE

The mope's confessing, Jay. He walked up to the Western desk to do it.

LANDSMAN

[LOOKING AT LOG] Well, at least when you go to manufacturing a murder, Eddie, you already have a suspect in hand. I respect that part of your game. [LOOKING BACK AT WHITE BOARD] Oh, that others might learn.

DETECTIVE

I need a witness for the statement in box number one.

LANDSMAN

Yeah. Let me dump my shit. I'll be there. [WALKS INTO OFFICE SINGING JINGLE BELL ROCK, "SNOWING AND BLOWING BUSHELS OF FUN,"]

CAMERA CUTS TO INTERROGATION ROOM. CAMERA IS BEHIND BUBBLES WHO IS LEANING ON TABLE, DETECTIVE IS SITTING ACROSS FROM HIM, FACING CAMERA.

DETECTIVE

Sodium cyanide. You telling me, if we do a full tox screen on this kid, he comes back positive for cyanide?

BUBBS

Yeah. [ROCKING BACK AND FORTH IN CHAIR]  
That's what I'm saying, okay?  
[LANDSMAN WALKS INTO INTERROGATION ROOM] You need to lock me up because I killed that boy, I did. I did it. I did it. So just—lock me up and be done with it, all right?

DETECTIVE

Where'd you get the cyanide?

BUBBS

[HEAD IN HANDS, SHAKING]

LANDSMAN

You getting sick there, Bunky? When's the last time  
you had your medicine?

BUBBS

No. No, I'm not getting high anymore, okay?

DETECTIVE

Let me ask you again, where'd you get cyanide  
from? If you're saying...

BUBBS

[LURCHES ONTO TABLE LIKE SOMEONE THREW HIM FROM BEHIND,  
SPEWING VOMIT ACROSS TABLE ALL OVER JAY LANDSMAN]

LANDSMAN

Fuck! [STANDS UP QUICKLY ARMS IN AIR NOT  
WANTING TO TOUCH ANYTHING]

BUBBS

I'm sorry. [CRYING]

DETECTIVE

Shit, he got my fucking sleeve

LANDSMAN

Just calm down we'll get something to clean this up,  
and maybe a soda or something, get some sugar in  
you at least.

BUBBS

I'm sorry. [CRYING, ROCKING BACK AND FORTH]

DETECTIVE

He settles down, I'll Miranda.

LANDSMAN

Yeah. Fuck. [TURNS TO GO IN BATHROOM.  
CAMERA SHOWS CLOSEUP OF HAND TURNING  
ON WATER, WIPING DOWN A VERY  
SATURATED BLUE SHIRT AND SNOWMAN TIE  
COVERED WITH SMALL PIECES OF SPAGHETTI.  
HE IS NOT UPSET, RATHER SEEING A LUDE

JOKE ABOUT HIS COMMANDING OFFICER,  
LAUGHS AND STARTS SINGING JINGLE BELL  
ROCK AGAIN.]

DETECTIVE  
[BANGING AGAINST VENDING MACHINE] Steals like my ex-wife's lawyer.  
[OPENS DOOR TO INTERROGATION ROOM]

LANDSMAN  
Jesus.  
[SEE BUBBLES HANGING FROM CEILING FROM HIS BELT]  
Get up there. [AS DETECTIVE STANDS ON CHAIR, LANDSMAN LIFTS  
BUBBLES TINY MOTIONLESS FRAME.] Come on, come on, come on!

DETECTIVE  
Give me a sec!

LANDSMAN  
[LOUDLY GROANING UNDER WEIGHT OF BODY]

THE DETECTIVE CUTS THROUGH THE BELT WITH A KNIFE AND BUBBS  
FALLS ACROSS LANDSMAN'S SHOULDER LIKE A RAG DOLL. HE LAYS HIM  
ON A TABLE, LOOSENS THE BELT AND CHECKS FOR A PULSE. BUBBS  
STARTS COUGHING.

DETECTIVE  
[RUNNING OUT OF ROOM] Call 911. The mutt in  
box one just tried to hang himself.  
[BUBBS STILL COUGHING ON TABLE. LANDSMAN  
SITS ON THE TABLE HOLDING BUBBS HAND, IN  
DISBELIEF]

[END SCENE.]

8:29 [LATER]

LANDSMAN  
How's he looking?



DETECTIVE

Pretty good considering. No worse than before he  
hung himself. [ADDRESSES ANOTHER DETECTIVE]  
Where the fuck are you going?

DETECTIVE 2

West Side. Freamon found another.

LANDSMAN

Fucking Freamon.

[WALKS BACK INTO INTERROGATION ROOM WHERE BUBBS IS SITTING  
WITH EMTs]

LANDSMAN

He a transport?

EMT

Borderline. Blood pressure almost normal. We gave  
him Ativan for withdrawal.

LANDSMAN

Hey, you want to go to a hospital?

BUBBS

[SHAKES HEAD NO]

LANDSMAN

Let me ask you something: What kind of a fellow rigs up a  
hot shot, then walks into a police station to talk about it?  
Huh? Who does that?

EMT

You want us to wait?

LANDSMAN

No. [LEANS AGAINST TABLE BUBBS IS SITTING ON]  
What is in your head, fella?

BUBBS

The hot shot was for this motherfucker that has been  
beating on me.

LANDSMAN

And the boy?

BUBBS

He was dipping. I knew he was. I—I just didn't – I didn't think...The child had no one for him—no mother, no family. He in the street like I'm in the street. So I tried to...[PAUSES DROPS HEAD] Like I ain't know who I am, right? Like I'm pretending I ain't been a dope fiend my whole damn life. Just lock me up, man. [LOOKS UP AT LANDSMAN] 'Cause I killed that child.

BOTH MEN LOOK STRAIGHT AHEAD. CAMERA SHOWS LANDSMAN WALKING THROUGH OFFICE, HANDS IN POCKETS, BACK TO FIRST DETECTIVES DESK. HE STARES BACK AT THE ROCKING FIGURE OF BUBBS BACK IN THE INTERROGATION ROOM.

LANDSMAN

The shot wasn't for the kid...Let's throw this one back. [DETECTIVE TURNS TO FACE HIM WITH AN INCREDULOUS LOOK ON HIS FACE] This sad-ass motherfucker's carrying more weight than we'll ever put on him.

DETECTIVE

What about the clearance?

LANDSMAN

[SIGHS] Fuck the clearance.

DETECTIVE

Cut him loose? Shit, he'll go off a roof or some shit. My luck, I'll catch that call too.

LANDSMAN

Maybe D ward over at Bayview, something with soft walls. [WALKS OFF].

[END SCENE.]

Instead of sending Bubbles back to a system into which Bubbles will vanish yet would clear his white board of one more murder, Landsman sends him to rehab and marks the case unsolved. It's a beautiful scene even in its

despair, yet the scene holds more meaning when the stories behind it are considered. That Landsman everyday blindly follows a path of banality, going through the day not thinking about the stories behind the dead bodies that cross the altar of his clearance-focused white board and immersed in the fulfillment of his own desires. And that Bubbles is not just a hobbling drug-fiend but a thriving entrepreneurial teacher who was also an adoptive parent. The scene is overwhelming in its staged starkness, a scene of utter wretchedness. And it is quintessential Simon because the scene reveals a third story; it tells a story of in-betweenness, of what's going on between the lines of statistics and stereotypes. It tells a story of found humanity through employing the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice.

It is possible, though not easily accomplished to view *The Wire* simply as struggle against power since the series contains common hypervisual notions of street criminals and serialized institutional neglect in a city past its prime. Applying specific philosophic and theoretical lenses that define the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice from Dewey, Greene and Purpel to the series creates another space in which to discuss *The Wire* as a space in which the actor-soldiers navigate; it becomes more than just a crime drama about winning and losing. Explored through the tool of moral imagination, the series takes on new meaning of connections, caring about the lives of others, and claiming responsibility for those lives; perhaps it is time for our society to

embrace a more feminine characteristic of economics and politics, (Eisler, 2007) more consistent with series revelations and to begin to instill a dominant ideology where everybody matters. Sandel further explains how experiencing community in this manner becomes sacrosanct to the continuation American democracy and, and how not upholding individual freedoms for the good of the whole and supporting a notion that everybody matters runs counter to supporting individual freedoms:

One of the most corrosive effects of putting a price on everything is on commonality, the sense that we're all in it together against the background of rising inequality. Marketing every aspect of life leads to a condition where those who are affluent and those who are of modest means increasingly lead separate lives....What matters is that people of different social backgrounds, different walks of life, encounter one another, bump up against one another in the ordinary course of life because this is what teaches us to negotiate and to abide our differences, (2013).

Simon consistently hints there are no simple or conclusive solutions, though there are winners and losers. By showing the daily struggles of characters that are literally face to face with decisions that involve preservation of human dignity, he shows characters who sometimes skillfully, often not intentionally, wield the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice. He lays out a composite picture that illustrates how the tool of moral imagination might be used in the service of social justice to dislodge notions of inequality brought on by consumerism and a market society, and points us in a direction

where we might more artfully live together by working to dislodge economic disparities across the population. Whatever conclusions the series does or does not provide, it uncovers a space in which to dive courageously, whole-heartedly exploring what it means to claim responsibility for others' experience, to poke and prod notions of wide-awakeness, and to ask critical questions which might reveal what it means to live most fully in a community where the lives of all people matter.

## CHAPTER V

### PROPHETIC IN-BETWEENNESS

Our ideas and stories are the blueprints for our future. Of course, ideas and stories don't arise in a vacuum. They come out of particular times and places, (Riane Eisler, 2007, p.139).

These uses of markets to allocate health, education, public safety, national security, criminal justice, environmental protection, recreation, procreation, and other social goods were for the most part unheard of thirty years ago. Today, we take them largely for granted, (Sandel, 2012, p. 8).

If the aptly labeled angriest man in television is David Simon (Bowden, 2008), then David Purpel should well be labeled the angriest man in education; the outrage of both men flows from a desire to repair a broken world where the lives of many don't seem to matter. Purpel was correct: our culture needs guidance to break out of a numbers-driven, consumer-laden lifestyle influenced by those with money and means to do so. Armed with the tool of moral imagination, *The Wire* provides a place to experiment with those discussions shortening the distance between "us and them," (Smiley & West). "But the

journey from one America to the other is epic. "Once you've become a citizen of one, it's really hard to find citizenship in the other," (Moyers, 2014).

Instead of public debate which is today reduced to "hostile and vacuous partisan spectacle," (Kadlec, 2007, p.1), "Disillusion with politics has deepened as citizens grow frustrated with a political system unable to act for the public good, or to address the questions that matter most," (Sandel, 2012, p.13).

Dewey, the most important public thinker in American in the first half of the twentieth century (Kadlec, 2007) wrote, "The only freedom that is of enduring importance is freedom of intelligence," (1938, p. 61). For Dewey being able to question from an educated perspective was critical because he saw informed public debate as foundational to survival of democracy. Through asking questions that delve into details beneath facts and figures, we flesh out components of discourse as well as a sense that the freedom of others is inextricably linked to our own. Campaigning for moral imagination as a vehicle to claim responsibility for community and the lives of others, Purpel combines education and wisdom to move toward compassionate intellectual freedom.

What would make traditional education sufficient is its integration with wisdom, with a moral vision that informs and directs the insights, reflections, and findings of serious inquiry towards a just world. The pursuit of knowledge...is not what the suffering hope for. What they hope for is compassion and wisdom, (1999, p.19).

An education navigated by the tool of moral imagination might measure how students value the human condition, similar to Purpel's agitated call for a holistic education as critical and carefully guided thought with the goal of "meeting our responsibilities to create a compassionate consciousness," (1999, p.129). Describing a Deweyan notion of self in community, Greene augments the view that compassionate freedom must be firmly situated in lived experience to make a difference.

Conscious thinking always involves a risk, a venture into the unknown; and it occurs against a background of funded or sedimented meanings that must themselves be tapped and articulated, so that the mind can continue dealing consciously and solicitously with lived situations, those situations in which we find ourselves, (1988, p.125).

Simon may have arrived upon an overarching theme of moral imagination without intending to do so in his pursuit to name society's failures through prophetic storytelling; utilizing the tool of moral imagination to find humanity also sculpts a notion of self within community. When we pick up the tool of moral imagination to push aside the banality of statistical averages and everyday taken-for-grantedness to question the habitual practices of the game, the value of all human lives is revealed and stories behind the statistics begin to matter. By valuing our contribution in community, we claim responsibility for the lives of all people along the wire and in the process begin to value our selves as worthy contributors—regardless of purchasing power.



This dissertation began as an investigation of what the tool of moral imagination entails, how we as individuals might access and use it, and what the outcome of that knowledge might be. After watching a few episodes of *The Wire*, I knew that series writers' moral vision was one in which all people mattered and reflected my own concerns with building community and supporting each other. This exploration used the tool of moral imagination to dig deeply beneath surface statistics that show statements like 25% of Baltimore's population lives in poverty (American community survey, 2012), or that 60% of Black students who drop out of high school spend time in prison, (Amurao, 2012) to examine the histories of human beings that make up the data points of those statistical averages. Just as some goods should not be traded, neither should some statistics go unquestioned.

Aided by the philosophies of Purpel, Greene and Dewey, this analysis was engaged through six themes that supply a foundation for how we might more thoroughly engage with moral imagination in the service of social justice on a daily basis because there is a crisis in our culture around how we value the lives of all people. Themes covered through textual analysis in chapters three and four of this dissertation are: (1) The idea that everybody matters; (2) The concept of a changing notion of truth; (3) Thoughtlessness and banality; (4) Wideawakeness and not taking things for granted; (5) Asking critical questions; and lastly, (6) Claiming responsibility for community. Applying these themes to

specific textual examples excerpted from the fictional television serial *The Wire* creates a space to move around and examine arguments from multiple perspectives. The process is truly a journey and one which for this writer is on-going.

### **The Prophetic In-between**

In claiming responsible for community with the tool of moral imagination in consideration of social justice issues, everybody matters. Yet the influx of market values into community highlights a different perspective and changes the nature of those communities, because to place value on a good changes the character of that good, (Sandel, 2012); devaluing one group in society the way our society devalues the lives of the poor and underemployed potentially devalues the whole society. I'd like to explore the notion of something I call 'prophetic inbetween-ness' in the context of market values because the stories we find beneath and between the statistics should create the fire that fuels our moral outrage to change the world we live in.

"Thematically, [*The Wire*] is about the very simple idea that, in this postmodern world of ours, human beings—all of us—are worth less...We're worth less every day," (Simon, 2006). Identifying oneself as a valuable piece of community and claiming responsibility for joining others in that responsibility is foundational to a concept of repairing and recreating a world in which we want our children and grandchildren to thrive; the tool of moral imagination helps us to

see ourselves in relationship to the well-being of others, encouraging us to ask critical questions and to take responsibility for answering them. From this perspective, the fictional storyline of *The Wire* becomes a platform for teasing out those moments of non-fiction self-recognition with which viewers might be able to connect, “to touch an elective affinity among viewers that the subject of their show is also about their own experience, even while the narrative of petit bourgeois ethnic whites and inner-city African Americans is not,” (Kennedy & Shapiro, 2012, p.4-5).

This dissertation describes a storyline for characters that does not leave a lot of room for joy and runs counter to a consumerism mentality where individuals are free to buy whatever they desire regardless of who is devalued or oppressed in that search for self through the acquisition of things. The development of the characters and circumstances also illustrates that in its composition *The Wire* does not depend on one idea of materialism to carry forward the writer’s angry message of systemic failure and devaluation of entire groups of people; the lesson is more about the people who become the collateral damage from other’s pursuit of money. Simon and other show writers show through character interdependence there are no easy answers to the problems of systemic dysfunction and institutional failure, but there is also a lot to be discussed. Through the interwoven and complex storyline, Simon constantly vividly illustrates Camus’ philosophical premise that to do nothing to

preserve human dignity—even in the face of adversity—is not an acceptable choice, (1947). Moreover, *The Wire* provides a sounding ground for viewers—educators and students across disciplines and civic institutions—to engage in a discussion and to “have the courage not only to examine the nature and impact of the culture but also to consider how we as individuals reflect the values and norms of the culture,” (Purpel, 1989, p.63) to be able to draw valid parallels and present rational but heart-felt argument against dominant ideologies inherent to a market society in a way that is accessible and forthright while at the same time uncovering stories of human wretchedness. Echoing Dewey’s notion of community and of the connection of all our histories, *The Wire* reminds the viewer in one soliloquy that should take place in all discussions of education and civic life: There is “nobody...who doesn’t matter,” (Simon, 2011).

The foundation of moral imagination requires consistently and deliberately acknowledging individual responsibility for members of community to guide actions. Greene notes that imagination entails the possibility of reaching into new situations to sort through and uncover those aspects of lives lived that illustrate reaching beyond (1995). Characters in *The Wire* recognize their connection to others through shared histories, reaching beyond possibilities because they are not satisfied with their impact on the community around them. Throughout my dissertation, I hear an urgent call from my chosen theorists and series writers that a discussion of children’s well-being not be put off. *The Wire*

can be used to look with fresh eyes at taken-for-granted ideologies communicated by statistics of impoverishment, homelessness and percentages about the number of children who go to sleep hungry each night. Harkening to Arendtian ideas of teaching the world as it is in preparation for acting in a public space, Greene also embraces teaching “alternative visions on what is offered as historical truth,” (1993, p. 218), urging educators to examine and interrogate literature and the arts to uncover new discussions. The quest for autonomous freedom of the mind cannot come at a price of others’ right to live without oppression and free from suffering, (Greene, 1988).

The characters and situations presented in this dissertation and in *The Wire* create a space for educators to adamantly and passionately discuss ‘prophetic inbetween-ness’—those stories woven in between the numbers—because overlapping, complicated characters, situations, and circumstance have little to do with typical measures of worth and assessment in a market society but everything to do with how people live and are valued. Every story between the numbers, percentages, facts, and figures matters to the overall outcome and composition for our whole society and therefore affects our own destinies as well. *The Wire* offers viewers the space to become saddened, angry, outraged and appalled at the conditions of the fictional storyline’s children, rarely offering the chance to be satisfied but leaving viewers guessing, to talk about the what-if’s. Simon and others do not attempt to tie things

together neatly and conclusively; to do so devalues the lived experiences of the people for whom writers and directors want us to become morally outraged and appalled. Quoted in an interview, he confides

*The Wire* had definite ideas about where we've gone wrong as a culture. *The Wire* had definite ideas about where the cities' dystopia came from. But it wasn't one overriding idea. There were many different themes, all of which were acting on each other, (Beck, 2008, p. 49).

There are no easy answers, yet there is a choice in our actions. Employing the tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice makes our actions more urgent, the devalued lives around us more valuable, and the choice to act to uphold human dignity all the more necessary.

In a market society where goods are traded and sold according to market values that affect the quality of life for all, when not everyone is valued do we ultimately devalue ourselves? This textual analysis of Simon's treatise against systemic dysfunction and inner-city poverty through the philosophical lenses of Purpel, Greene, and Dewey, explores this and other critical questions under the guide of moral imagination in consideration that all lives matter and are valuable. "The last few decades have been especially hard on poor and middle-class families. Not only has the gap between rich and poor widened, the commodification of everything has sharpened the sting of inequality by making money matter more," (Sandel, 2012, p.9). Market societies operate respective

of individual worth. There are some goods that should not be bought or sold because there are some who cannot afford them at market price—education, health care, environmental protections, and criminal justice are examples; access to these goods effects the quality of lived experience. Market societies promote the circumstances for further widening a growing chasm between those with money and those without money because those with money decide which goods are bought and sold, as well as the price of those goods.

The money in this country is controlled by a very small percentage of the population (Smiley & West, 2013) so when we see headlines along the lines of ‘the market indexes are rising,’ there is a need to think more closely about this statement to think about who controls the markets. This dissertation is not a diatribe against capitalism per se, but rather a suggestion that we as a society contemplate more thoroughly those ‘goods’ whose access is determined by whether or not money is available to buy those ‘goods’ and what the characteristic of supply and demand might do to the ‘goods’ being traded. Should educational opportunities and affordable healthcare be for sale to the highest bidder when the education and health of our society affects the entire society? When statistical statements are delivered as market-increase percentages, then we as a society must engage in public discourse about what those facts and figures really mean. I chose to engage an exploration of the stories in between within the fictional realm of *The Wire*—the prophetic

inbetween—in hopes of practicing the idea of not taking things for granted, to instead look at people and situations with eyes wide-awake, and to more closely investigate what we as a society value.

Closely linked to this notion is an intuition that devaluing some individuals and entire groups of people in a society ultimately leaves people feeling that they have no responsibility for the lives of others. The growing chasm between the haves and have-nots does not only represent monetary influence, but also the distance we maintain from others in our hearts. This dissertation supported through the philosophies of Purpel, Greene, and Dewey and the civic mindedness of series creators, argues that the tool of moral imagination should be more deliberately exercised in hopes of dislodging this notion of separation, both mentally and economically.

### **Education and Social Justice**

Greene's persuasions support the value of the individual and individual freedom, "Only when individuals are empowered to interpret the situations they live together do they become able to mediate between the object-world and their own consciousness, to locate themselves so that freedom can appear, (1988, p.122). She also writes about autonomous freedom of the mind, "to think about human rights and justice," (p.118) and cautions against individual freedom that impose on the freedoms of others to live without oppression. *The Wire* offers multiple opportunities for viewers to tease apart the conflicts that arise when



market society encounters civic life and individual freedoms, particularly in the spaces of education. Greene describes this consciousness as autonomy of mind—the ability to think freely, question openly, and to look at problems and opportunities from different perspectives:

If the presumption is that autonomy is associated with “higher order” thinking and with the ability to conceptualize abstractions like human rights and justice, and if indeed such principles become maxims of individual conduct, many conclude that autonomous persons can be considered free persons, (Greene, 1988, p.118)

Purpel suggests that the role of educators is “to encourage and guide students to an imagination that goes far beyond ours, to help them to develop a consciousness that we are unable...to conceive,” (1989, p.136). Illustrating cries against his notion of “a pedagogy of control and standardization” in schooling, *The Wire* also repeatedly echoes Purpel’s ideas of “a pedagogy of transformation and meaning,” (Purpel, 1999, p.188) for systems surrounding human lives, pushing out the banality of bureaucratic, numbers-influenced decision-making with a heart-felt attempt toward a holistic education, encouraging autonomy, exposing dominant ideologies, and looking with fresh eyes. I place *The Wire* within a category of prophetic storytelling for this reason: through the histories presented therein, voices speak out at injustices found in one cities’ impoverished neighborhoods almost as a battle cry for viewers to do something to change their own communities. I hope viewers would finish the

series by saying, “I feel you,” to series’ actors, writers and directors, because to “feel” something as a response to input employs the aesthetic in an otherwise rational encounter. Similar to Marcuse’s new sensibility (1969) to feel in this sense means to have touched something with both heart, mind, and gut; ‘I feel you’ is a version of ‘I understand you,’ but goes much deeper than comprehension. It means, “I know where you are coming from. I feel it in my bones and am right there with you.”

### **Encountering Moral Imagination**

*The Wire* is viewed “increasingly as an informed generator for academic research and teaching, a de facto scholarly contribution in its own right about urban policy, the war on drugs, the transition from a manufacturing economy to one based in services and speculation, and the failures of public education and public sphere journalism,” (Kennedy & Shapiro, 2012, p.4). This dissertation makes a case that *The Wire* should also be viewed as a textbook for illustrating the tool of moral imagination in all educational situations, and especially when confronting the lived experiences of children and the market culture which educates them.

This line of thought is a jumping off point for a wider consideration of how moral imagination might intersect with educating for greater equality, democracy, and human dignity by applying a definition in consideration of social justice issues to fictional scripted experiences from *The Wire*. Critical questions

arise: How can educators exercise a moral imagination? Where does moral imagination exist within market societies? What is the value to understanding the world as it is in relation to what it could be? How should educators impart use of imagination to go beyond what *is*—especially gender, sexual, racial, and other demographic stereotypes—to encourage others to act in the face of adversity with the hope of sustaining human dignity?

Distance and moral imagination run a parallel course; the farther individuals are from witnessing the impact of their choices, the blurrier and softer their focus becomes. Secondly, although providing a bigger picture, the widened view that comes as a result of distancing oneself from a fixed point introduces objects into the picture that compete for viewers' attention. Sometimes it is hard to pay attention to everything in sight. Statistical statements about averages have a lens-widening effect, creating a lot of room for diversions; the banality of numbers blurs the content of statistical data points—the people whose lived circumstance the data point depicts. Numbers are often taken for granted, and what they really communicate is often overlooked. The tool of moral imagination brings statistics and averages into better focus by uncovering details of their genesis. It is no consequence that Arendt's new type of "consequence-blind bureaucrat," (Young-Breuhl, 2006, p.5) criminal specifically heralded after the rise of twentieth century industrialism and the dominant ideology of consumerism.

### **Moral Imagination and Education—Lessons from *The Wire***

Simon and co-creator Burns take us into the education system from many angles, through individual students, new teachers, veteran teachers, administrators, police informants, ex-police commanders, drug addicts, “stoop kids, and corner kids,” (Simon, 2011). There are no teacher-heroes, though there is valiant teaching. If “the Hollywood spin on the heroic teacher and the villainous administration,” (Rudolph, 2006, p.427), influences public opinion and recreates itself, Simon’s and Burns’ fresh take on the intricacies of bureaucratic education may have the same effect as well.

Simon persuasively examines a pervasive market culture entrenched upon the everyday lived experience of students in the Baltimore City Schools usurping a position counter to what is presented of school settings in cultural media. The Hollywoodization of urban schools often depicts run-down settings where all students are failing and living in abusive or impoverished instances, (Rudolph, 2006). Even the term “urban” is a signal that means “poverty, non-white violence, narcotics, bad neighborhoods, an absence of family values, crumbling housing, and failing schools,” (Kincheloe et al, 2006, p.xi). The US Department of Education reported 15.8 percent of all students enrolled in an urban area school are considered to be living in poverty, (2003) [leaving almost 84 percent who are not]. *The Wire* illustrates the amazing mix of people found in urban schools, but does not shy away from problems inherent to an inner-city

student body because the show portrays the details of the lives lived of multiple diverse students and teachers.

A typical studio-backed film about public schools features a new teacher or administrator who arrives on the scene and surpassing all odds saves the day; the school's occupants and employees would be out of luck without the emergence of the newly-arrived teacher-administrator-hero because they are helpless to understand much less effect their own situations. Television and film depictions do not typically show the lived experience of students as much as they present a save-the-day fictional character with the sole aim to rescue the students, (Rudolph, 2006). The writers of *The Wire* introduce viewers to the school setting by examining the lives of the students that will attend the school before they ever step foot on school property, providing some characters at least a sense of influence. Viewers quickly learn who these kids represent.

Greene writes, "We all need to recognize each other in our striving, our becoming, our inventing of the possible," (1993, p.219). There are many ways a child is educated; this dissertation explored the education of fictional corner and stoop kids from a new perspective, not with soft eyes, but with fresh eyes. "*The Wire's* achievement is not simply within its high-value narrative vision, but its promise to change the viewer's own preexisting perception about urban social ecology within twentieth-first century America," (Kennedy & Shapiro, 2012, pp 4-5). Popular films' urban school settings typically open scenes of students

accompanied by a soundtrack of loud rap music (Rudolph, 2006) immediately distancing the scene and students as subjects to be studied by non-listeners of rap music much like the researcher studies students in season four. Simon takes a different approach.

Former Officer Prysbylewski, played by Jim True-Frost, does not arrive at the school expecting or pretending to be a hero or to save the day, nor does he emerge as a savior over the course of the series. More likely, he arrives on the scene hoping to save himself. He cultivates relationships with his students using tools of moral imagination, adopting his talent for cracking codes while listening in on a police wiretap as an educator who “listens in” to his students and approaches problems from their perspective. Greene writes about the relationship of autonomous freedom as an ability to look from someone else’s perspective, asking critical questions, and practicing alternative ways of connecting.

Rather than posing dilemmas to students or presenting models of expertise, the caring teacher tries to look through the students’ eyes, to struggle with them as subjects in search of their own projects, their own ways of making sense of the world. Reflectiveness, even logical thinking remains important; but the point of cognitive development is not to gain an increasingly complete grasp of abstract principles. It is to interpret from as many vantage points as possible lived experience, the ways there are of being in the world, (1988, p.120).

Prysbylewski is a dot-connector and puzzle-solver. He knows all people matter to the bigger picture; he learned that lesson firsthand in season one from Detective Lester Freamon, played by Clark Peters. He is befuddled but unsurprised when he realizes that the same bureaucratic games of statistical averages and clearance rates front and center on the police station white board and reported up the chain of command for politicians to wield during elections are alive and well in the school system administration.

Placing market values on systems of education changes the attributes associated with that system (Sandel, 2012). What societies reward becomes what is produced. For example, teachers are not encouraged to problem solve or to connect with students—to listen in—but to instruct students to stay in the lines when filling in bubbles on a Scantron sheet in order to improve test scores.

**“Boys of Summer,” Season 4, Episode 1, (Simon, 2011).**

EXT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM/TEACHERS MEETING – DAY

FORMER OFFICER, ROLAND PRYSBYLEWSKI  
I don’t get it. All this so we score higher on the state tests? If we’re teaching the kids the test questions, what is it assessing in them?

GRACE SAMPSON, TEACHER  
Nothing, it assesses us. The test scores go up, they can say the schools are improving.  
The scores stay down, they can’t.

FORMER OFFICER, ROLAND PRYSBYLEWSKI  
Juking the stats.

GRACE SAMPSON, TEACHER  
Excuse me?

FORMER OFFICER, ROLAND PRYSBYLEWSKI  
Making robberies into larcenies, making rapes disappear.  
You juke the stats and majors become colonels. I've been  
here before.

GRACE SAMPSON, TEACHER  
Wherever you go, there you are.

With examples like these, the series creates a space for viewers to see with fresh eyes, to see an urban school setting that digs deep into the lives of the students and the teachers that teach there; but also one where the actions of administrators are not that different from the bureaucracies of the city police and government offices.

The commodification of our education system and our civic life (Sandel, 2013) is reflected in the banking system of schooling that we inflict on our children daily. Simon explores the theme of lived experience in school settings saying, "*The Wire* is really not interested in good and evil, it's interested in economics and sociology and politics," (Simon, 2011) of educational encounters, and the hidden inter-relatedness of the systemic structures in which human beings live. In a dodge of irony, he notes that it is no accident that a series about the lives of Baltimore citizens is created by people that live and work in Baltimore, not in Hollywood. He laughs when he points out the irony of the series appearing on television, which is usually seen as an escapist medium. "I



do these stories that maybe are not so much about what's on the entertainment page but maybe about what's on the op-ed and maybe about what needs to be discussed rather than what's easy to discuss," (MacArthur Foundation, 2010). Clearly society's overlapping systems of educating take top spot in his story budget.

### **Lessons from Fictional Television Serial Drama**

Can *The Wire* or any piece of literature, art or film really teach this lesson? Expecting to be entertained, Simon instead takes the audience by surprise introducing deep philosophical, sociological, and systemic themes that deserve to be teased apart and reassembled more than once to reveal multiple layers of overlapping and connection. *The Wire* shows instances where moral imagination can replace thoughtlessness—that banality of not thinking critically about the plight of fellow humans—and that the lives of all human beings are worthy of a dignified existence unheeded by market values.

In the storyline, a dominant ideology of economic power leaves a trail of punishment and outlines the changing notion of truth through multiple shifts on the street corners, in the boardroom, in political pandering, and in civic institutions. The shifts also begin to hone the tool of moral imagination for individual characters who ask critical questions around the 'what if'. "*The Wire* offers its viewers a critique of institutional power and the discourses of truth associated with such power," (Fuggle, 2009, p. 1). In the fictional storyline, with

each shift of power human lives are valued less and less. Game rules are altered each time power shifts. For example at the beginning of season one the Barksdale people leave a burned and bludgeoned man strapped across the hood of an old sedan to denote power and instill fear; by season four victims are discarded and disappear inside closed and boarded up row houses, never to be seen again. *The Wire* thematically shows human beings whose lives (and deaths) matter less and less. The demise of tragic hero Omar Little, played by Michael K. Williams, who robbed from and upstaged players, supported community, took his grandmother to church every Sunday, and survived jumping from a five-story building is eventually reported in the newspaper, below the fold as “another Westside murder, black male...” (Simon, 2011).

Characters’ divergence away from market values marked by pursuit of profit toward one employing the tool of moral imagination propel the storyline forward. They illustrate that acting in the preservation of human dignity requires recognition of self as a member of a community and becoming responsible for the lives in that community. Purpel writes about the same thing; “the power of the spirit is the very energy we need lest we fall into the paralysis and cynicism that are the consequences of moral despair and intellectual confusion,” (1999, p. 159). Characters in *The Wire* also illustrate the tool of moral imagination influencing actions to end oppression, countering “vast and needless human suffering in our midst,” (p. 159). The moment characters recognize another’s

peril and choose to act toward ending suffering, the tool of moral imagination is tapped and the opportunities are uncovered for characters (and viewers alike) to work to end oppression by exploring the taken for granted and asking critical questions.

### **We're All in This Together**

Utilizing the exotic lure of the series' characters, violence, tension, and sticky situations, the series' writers intertwine critical questions about the society we live in, confronting lessons to be learned about the issues surrounding poverty and economic disparities, and examining how market values influence these spheres. The writers of *The Wire* introduced serious, uncomfortable issues that confront the stereotypes of urban, street corner characters. Dewey promoted the idea that democracy is a community always in the making (1954, p. 148); Simon opens up the space to include the education of all the people in that making—the addicts, the students, the law enforcement, the families, nurses and community leaders, including those human lives living in impoverished conditions and off the grid, represented only in statistical facts and figures, if ever represented at all. *The Wire* does indeed depict a kind of prophetic inbetween-ness derived from “the operation of simultaneously privileging and distancing the colonial narrative, and moving beyond it,” (Shohat, p.107). The series does not provide answers to decreasing instances of inequality, racial bias, and human suffering wrought human being upon human

being. Instead, the series promotes and asks critical questions, most prominently “If situations like this are going to impact our future and our children’s futures, what are we going to do about it?” Part of the journey resides in the space of education, the way we teach each other, and the way we learn, process and apply new knowledge.

Our society cannot continue to take for granted that when test scores go up, students are learning and schools are improving. Applying the tool of moral imagination within our systems of education we need to ask critical questions to determine in what exactly the schools are improving! If the answer is that they’re improving at churning out students unable to think for themselves or to critically engage and interpret media, if they are graduating more students who are unable to seek out new knowledge for themselves, then what kind of future are we establishing? By not critically questioning statistical averages describing the educating influences of our communities, we are aiding the dominant ideology of cookie-cutter and test-banked schooling among society’s most vulnerable population, our children.

*The Wire*’s plotline leaves the impression that the goal of education should not be about simply raising test scores, but about making sure that people have the skills to survive, thrive and to pay attention to the state of other human beings using the tool of moral imagination. Its theme that there is actually very little distance between “us and them,” (Smiley & West, 2012)

creates the room for a discussions of an holistic education, not education as a dumping ground for bubble-filled questionnaires and teachers who keep the heat turned up to keep students sleepy. Simon first draws viewers' attention to a school scenario that isn't easy to watch, and then goes one step further by laying out a different set of street knowledge and skills students need to survive. Burns says, "You see [these boys] initially very child-like, in the throws of the middle school mind, and in thirteen episodes, they go on a journey...we're trying to make you feel for these kids because they are—children" (Simon, 2011). Most importantly, applied through *The Wire* the tool of moral imagination leaves the precise impression that we're all in this together.

Dewey's connection of community through shared histories is also integral to this concept. *The Wire's* corner boys' histories repeat as these teens grow up quickly to take the place of their older role models; it is the same story driven by profit but with new players. Bunny Colvin, played by Robert Wisdom, explains this to a school superintendent when she threatens to end his research program.<sup>1</sup>

But it's not about you or us, or the test or the system. It's what they expect of themselves. I mean, every single one of them know they heading back to the corners, their brothers and sisters, shit their parents, they came through these same classrooms didn't they? We pretended to teach them, they pretended to learn and where they end up? Same damn corners. I mean, they not fools these kids. They don't

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of this excerpt is found in chapter four, theme four, second example.

know our world, but they know they own. I mean, Jesus, they see right through us.

### **What Do We Expect of Ourselves?**

*The Wire* is an examination of the state of American democracy and the systems sewn into our culture, most prominently those of consumerism, class, and education, between the statistics of poverty, crime and neglect. The series provides ample space for discussions of how democracy might move forward, reinvent, and evolve toward more sustainable systems that value and support the freedom and dignity of all human beings, not just a few. Viewers are “not being duped into watching self-contained little morality plays or character studies. We really are telling the story of a city as best we can—a city and its attendant problems and the reasons it can't solve its own problems,” (McCabe, 2006) says Simon. Remembering Bunny Colvin’s comment to school administrators, I also ask, what do we expect of ourselves when we think about claiming responsibility for community?

The system of education in a market society is one path where institutional practices and histories might be questioned. When schools are assessed on students’ test scores, the test score becomes a unit of exchange to be bought, sold, even traded. “When we decide that certain goods may be bought and sold, we decide, at least implicitly, that it is appropriate to treat them as commodities, as instruments of profit and use,” (Sandel, 2012, p.9).

Assessing schools becomes a unit of exchange whose value is low and sometimes taken for granted. All who teach must approach education and communication from a place of radical love and responsible concern, recognizing all people as part of a community in the making for which they themselves are responsible, working to overturn systems of inept school and teacher assessments through student testing. Simon notes, "Obsession with statistics is one of the post-industrial nightmares," (2011). Stories within *The Wire* serve not just to entertain, but to provoke, "If not to the point of an argument, then at least to the point of a thought or two about who we are, how we live, and what it is about our society and the human condition that makes it so," (Alvarez, 2009, p.11). *The Wire* prophetically defines multiple spaces of learning through storytelling and seriously interrogates statistical subjects like departmental clearance rates and school test scores; and focused through the philosophies of Purpel, Greene, and Dewey, this space of prophetic inbetweenness is where we might also garner the energy and insights to become not just informed observers but actors digging beneath statistics and census reports until we uncover the details and emerge as outraged participants concerned that our democracy has gone awry.

When we use fresh eyes to look beneath and around qualitative information to the stories between the statistics we have the opportunity to connect and feel the story; the tool of moral imagination pushes the banality of

numbers to the side. The viewers of *The Wire* eventually experience these stories with clearer more detailed focus even amidst preconceived notions of urban inhabitants or the commercial-induced rhythm of police television drama with which they may first encounter the series. *The Wire* slowly and methodically opens up those notions and fills the space in-between the statistics describing human suffering with paths to critical questioning and stories of both human suffering and triumph. This may be the reason the series audience keeps growing six years after its end; it retains the possibility for humanity to embrace the tool of moral imagination long after its initial run.

Simon describes *The Wire* as an offering of love for the city of Baltimore. As he is educating a viewing audience, he explores and redefines people in the city overturning mass media stereotypes of inner-city lives; by exposing the dark crevices as well as the highlights, the picture begins to pop away from an hypervisual imitation into one of individuals within community. Wilson adds, "You want to talk about it being fiction, call it fiction," he says, "but it shows incredible imagination and understanding about the way the world works, and for me that's enough," (Bennett, 2010, p.3). Simon's treatment breaks down preconceived notions of urbanness and replaces those misconceptions with stories of lived experience. Analyzed through the tool of moral imagination supported by the philosophies of Purpel, Greene, and Dewey, *The Wire* also illustrates a pedagogy of questioning how to turn difficulties into possibilities



(Freire, 1997) and of claiming responsibility for community. Once critical questions start to be nudged, an opportunity to reach for possibilities begins to emerge as well. The tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice helps to clear a footpath for critical questioning where the lives of people are at stake, and then focuses attention toward claiming responsibility for upholding human dignity and eliminating oppression for all lives being lived.

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## APPENDIX A

### THEMES AND EXAMPLES IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

THEME ONE—All the pieces matter;  
FIRST EXAMPLE—The wiretap setup  
Detective Lester Freamon, Officer Roland Prysbylewski

THEME ONE—All the pieces matter;  
SECOND EXAMPLE—The game  
D'Angelo Barksdale, Wallace, Preston "Bodie" Brodus

THEME ONE—All the pieces matter;  
THIRD EXAMPLE—Bodie's execution  
Poot, Bodie

THEME TWO— A changing notion of truth;  
FIRST EXAMPLE—Snot Boogie  
Detective Jimmy McNulty, eyewitness

THEME TWO—A changing notion of truth  
SECOND EXAMPLE—Nobody, no victim  
Omar Little, Detective Bunk Moreland

THEME TWO— A changing notion of truth;  
THIRD EXAMPLE—The Sunday morning truce  
Omar Little, Reynoldo, Kimmie, Slim Charles, Sam, other guy

THEME TWO—A changing notion of truth;  
FOURTH EXAMPLE—The debate  
Councilman Tommy Carcetti, Mayor Royce, Councilman Tony Brown, Namond Brice

THEME THREE—Banality and thoughtlessness;  
FIRST EXAMPLE—Wallace makes a call  
Wallace, Stringer Bell, D'Angelo Barksdale

THEME THREE—Banality and thoughtlessness;  
SECOND EXAMPLE—Bodie agrees to shoot Wallace  
Stringer Bell, Bodie

THEME THREE—Banality and thoughtlessness;  
THIRD EXAMPLE—The balcony scene  
Stringer Bell, Avon Barksdale

THEME FOUR—Beyond the taken for granted;  
FIRST EXAMPLE—Soft eyes  
Teacher Roland Prysbylewski, Grace Sampson

THEME FOUR—Beyond the taken for granted;  
THIRD EXAMPLE: Drug fiends are people too  
D'Angelo Barksdale, Bodie, Wallace, Bubbs

THEME FOUR—Beyond the taken for granted;  
SECOND EXAMPLE—Bunny Colvin and the university professor  
Bunny Colvin, University Professor (name?), School Superintendent

THEME FIVE—Asking better questions;  
FIRST EXAMPLE—Where does all the money go?  
D'Angelo Barksdale, Stringer Bell

THEME FIVE: Asking critical questions—  
SECOND EXAMPLE: Why do you care?  
Detective Jimmy McNulty, Judge Phalan

THEME FIVE: Asking critical questions—  
THIRD EXAMPLE: You didn't ask because you didn't want to know.  
Frank Sabotka, Nick Sabotka, Spiros

THEME FIVE: Asking critical questions—  
FOURTH EXAMPLE: When it's really not your turn.  
Bubbs, Johnny Weeks

THEME SIX: People claiming responsibility—  
FIRST EXAMPLE: The game ain't in me no more.  
Dennis "Cutty" Wise, Slim Charles, Avon Barksdale

THEME SIX: People claiming responsibility—  
SECOND EXAMPLE: Wallace doesn't want to play  
D'Angelo Barksdale, Wallace

THEME SIX: People claiming responsibility—  
THIRD EXAMPLE: Hamsterdam  
Bunny Colvin, Ellis Carver, the Deacon

THEME SIX: People claiming responsibility—  
FOURTH EXAMPLE: Colvin asks for Namond  
Bunny Colvin, Wee-Bay Brice

THEME SIX: People claiming responsibility—  
FIFTH EXAMPLE: Clearance rates  
Bubbles, Sargent Landsman, Detective Norris

## APPENDIX B

### METHODOLOGY

*The Wire* can be examined through multiple theorists and philosophies. Since arguments about discourse, power and truth must be just as pertinent to a discussion as to the materials analyzed (Rose, 2007) I worked to maintain focus on instances of moral outrage and responsibility for others in community with regard to changing notions of truth and with a keen eye on the role of power in a consumer-driven society. Simon's treatise on urban dysfunction helps to access a part of our culture not readily available for investigation that can be approached from many directions. My worthwhile argument around moral imagination is but one of many.

This interpretation makes sense of *The Wire* through a specific theoretical and philosophical framework laid out in chapter two of this dissertation. The tool of moral imagination in the service of social justice finely sharpens illustrations in the text which left unexamined might remain unnoticed. Focusing on issues of economic disparity, class injustice, systemic dysfunction and the failure of the education system augments and informs a role of claiming responsibility for others' lives. Using *The Wire* as text to examine moral imagination must surely

be added to the series' critical media accolades and continuing discussions in scholarly work.

## **Audience**

When I first looked for a box-set edition of *The Wire* a couple of years ago, nowhere was a version in the widescreen 16:9 ratio which I prefer watching especially with the advent of high definition television units bearing those same dimensions. It wasn't available in widescreen and that revelation was perplexing. The answer lies in the time and place in which Simon and other writers developed the series. Perhaps Simon specifically chose to film his opus in a squarish, old-style television frame, 4:3, to aim for that part of the population that would not have access to the latest in upscale media-viewing accoutrements; at the turn of the century high definition television sets were still priced out of reach especially for lower-income households. What that says to me is although Simon aired his series on HBO, a high-end premium channel, his message format was aimed at the masses.

Perhaps his choice indicates he liked the square shape because of the ability to frame faces and focus detail without visual distractions in the wings. Simon's chosen screen ratio also historically facilitated the ability to focus on faces and dialogue both by directors and audiences; the arrival of wide-screen with larger screen ratios parallels the arrival of landscape and action movies, (Rose, 2007). It seems his choice of the older-style 4:3 television screen ratio

perhaps infers that he deliberately chose to focus on the detail of his story and not the glitz of fast-action speed chases in a typical cops and robber action serial. Much of the story from the series actually takes place off screen.

Since we must comprehend a text by understanding the frame of reference from which it was produced, (Rose, 2007) it is useful to look at the format chosen to exhibit the communication. Simon purposefully conceptualized his treatise in the historical format of a popular medium: television. As a transmitter of society's values. (Barnouw, 1978), a place formerly held by newspapers and today being relinquished to cloud-based communications, Simon's decision to air the series on television as a transmitter of cultural values evolves naturally from his trade and training as a print-based reporter of story intent to uncover and connect the lives in the headlines to everyday existence. Simon was not inclined to relinquish his commentary in a format not aimed at the masses.

Mass culture and communication plays a pivotal role in a consumer society; television and mass media work together with social institutions, the state, and the economy to form a capitalist system, (Kellner, 1990). Even though airing on HBO, this series was not targeted to theatre-going audiences or upscale households; it was written to be transmitted and consumed at all levels of society as an alarm on the state of democracy. Textual analysis researchers stress the interpretation of a text from a hermeneutic philosophy must always be

undertaken from the viewer's particular standpoint, (Scott, 2006) where is the viewer reading or watching the text in question. For this reason, many of my methodological resources focus on the television medium as a visual resource, and are augmented by other aesthetic nuances such as spoken word and dialect, and use of other visual imagery. This inference of meaning is possible by juxtaposing the text beside other television shows and Hollywood film depictions that cover a similar subject matter, as well as centering the storyline within headlines of inner city poverty and socio-economic decline.

### **Data Collection Sites**

With the observation of instances describing failures of democracy and an urgent appeal to the masses in hand, my research became more focused. After identifying salient points of exploration in my chosen theorists, Purpel, Greene, and Dewey, I was able to access and view the series through multiple points: both an illegally copied and law-abiding non-bootlegged DVD box set; from the cloud on HBO Go; and oddly enough as small YouTube segments uploaded in their entirety without thought to copyright compliance. My point is that I had the ability to watch the series in spots other than from in front of a television set, and although I spent a good deal of time in front of a screen in those first months, the importance of the ability to go back and quickly review specific scenes should not go unnoted.

## **Study Design**

Textual Analysis for this dissertation employs interdisciplinary study of cultural media as an area of inquiry; it touches upon aesthetic and media studies discourse, the hermeneutic of both the writer/director and viewer, and interrogates educational philosophies and critical inquiry supporting a notion of moral imagination situated within a framework of a search for social justice. Viewpoints, spoken words, and visual frames within the series are combined for an analysis “to open up statements to challenge, and interrogate taken-for-granted meanings,” (Tonkiss, 1998, p.259). My analysis aims to persuade that the tool of moral imagination in a community claiming responsibility for democracy and issues of social justice cannot be separated, (Rose, 2007). Admittedly this analysis constructs an interpretation which although urgent is not the only truth. (Phillips and Hardy, 2002, p.83-85)

## **Preparation for Data Collection**

Kellner underscores the observation that media consumption influences the ways in which people construct their identities regarding class, race, success and power; it also defines what people perceive to be the prevalent world view, and this is a perception created by consumer-driven culture, (1995). My observations reconstructing examples where moral imagination is utilized through character and situational development constantly kept this idea present. I understand that I am looking at the product of a consumer-driven society: mass



media entertainment. But choosing to do a textual analysis of a product of consumer culture does not lessen the values located therein and perhaps provides the opportunity to access multiple levels of experience that might not be available otherwise. “We must comprehend a text by understanding the frame of reference from which it was produced, and the researcher's own frame of reference becomes the springboard from which this becomes possible,” (Scott, 2006, p.1). Simon chose to deliver his message through a venue that would also provide him compensation. As a scholar, I recognize that I am also choosing to craft my product through a similar, though not identical, platform—and I can only assume there is a vast difference in compensation as well! Nevertheless, it seems in our consumer-driven society even moral outrage becomes a good for sale.

### **Data Collection Process**

Jumping into a viewing frenzy of the series entailed back-to-back episodes not because I was pressed for time—I started watching almost two years ago—but because the story stayed with me long past turning it off. Like a good book, I wanted to know what was happening to characters. I surprised myself, having avoided the series during its initial run for fear of being exposed to overly violent and depressing dramatizations. Today I re-watch the beginning of season four to see the boys before they encounter all that the series throws in their path. I think it is fantastically ironic that Tristan Wilds, who played up-and-

coming gangster Micheal Lee, starred next on *Beverly Hills 90210*. I genuinely cheered to see Michael B. Jordan, who plays Wallace in season one, standing on the stage with Kristen Bell at the Academy Awards last month.

In the beginning I watched the series with headphones and closed captioning; sometimes the rhythm and intonation of syllables in the speech is difficult to encounter or to place within the context of street-smart jargon. A master of language, Simon also weaves a story full of significant content communicated through overt gestures and subtle eye contact. I made good use of the ability to rewind and fast-forward at the click of a button, and even if a certain scene hit me in the middle of an afternoon, I could look it up quickly online. For me, the nuance of the language became integral because of phrases like, “you feel me,” “the game is the game,” and other expressions both colloquial and descriptive of my definition of moral imagination. Because the words themselves are important to a comprehensive understanding, I have encountered and understand other viewers’ tendency to watch with closed captioning turned on as well.

### **Procedures and Organization**

Once examples and of-interest snippets were collected over months of research, I indexed and sorted scripts and clips by theme; I also sorted them by character and noted where themes and characters overlapped. I purposefully tried to stay away from popular and much covered characters and instead went

to places where sparks of moral imagination lay hidden and worked to piece together thoughts and words to make sense of this new way of viewing the series. I looked for pieces describing my understanding of democracy and learning by doing because I knew those components were foundational to Dewey. I looked for instances that instilled moral outrage because I knew these spots would be skeletal to the work of Purpel and Greene. I wrote down thoughts and compiled detailed descriptions of visual set and action while the words were spoken. I wrote down examples from multiple categories at first, but narrowed them down once my definition of moral imagination as a tool in the service of social justice became more and more concrete.

Because of the nature of textual inquiry, multiple interpretations are possible from individual to individual and even emerging from the same person (Rose, 2007) and I found this to be true from week to week and month to month. When I re-watched particular episodes, new evidence in support of the tool of moral imagination was often revealed depending on what I was contemplating while viewing, what was going on in the world around me, and what I knew would happen in future episodes.

I made precise, deliberate choices in what I choose to discuss, and focused my analysis toward the tool of moral imagination encountered through spaces of education across characters and seasons; admittedly there are multiple interpretations of both the text and particular examples I choose to

illustrate my argument, (Rose, 2007). My work both supports and interrogates other perspectives, especially those texts and references used in academic settings, those labeled in support of a crisis of democracy, and outraged individual resonance emanating as the result of consumer-driven society by-product.

### **Validity**

While other interpretations are possible, this interpretation is not arbitrary or capricious but makes sense of the text in ways that open up spaces for conversation beyond stereotypical cops and robber, who-done-it fare, highlighting a coherent well thought-out path for moral imagination in consideration of social justice issues. Specifically: everybody matters; a changing notion of truth; banality and thoughtlessness; upending taken-for-grantedness; asking critical questions; and people claiming responsibility. Through intense, lengthy, multiple readings of the text, my interpretation achieves this.

To embark upon a textual analysis of a series like *The Wire* might admittedly be perceived as a disadvantage for me; I fall into the middle-class, white female demographic. Yet this outsider's perspective also serves a purpose to profoundly interrogate taken-for-granted notions and to look with fresh eyes. And there is more to me than a statistical description of viewing habits and purchasing power, economic viability or level of educational

achievement. There is a story here between the statistical averages that tells of a mother, a teacher, and an outraged and passionate individual. Perhaps also because of my demographic, I have a good chance of calling others' attention to injustices and disparities not just uncovered in this text, but in everyday experience as well. I claim this responsibility.